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OR,

The Great Detective's Long Chase.

A Romance of the Little Colorado.

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"THE BAT OF THE BATTERY," "OVERLAND
KIT," "THE FRESH OF 'FRISCO," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

KANGAROO TOM.

"LIGHT down, stranger! For the love of goodness 'light down, spread yourself out over the airth and lemme see what you are made of!"
A peculiar greeting from a peculiar man and in a peculiar country.

A rough and broken trail over a rocky divide, where the stunted pines and junipers struggled for existence in a scanty soil.

'Twas in the very heart of Arizona, that marvelous country, rock-ribbed with all sorts of precious minerals, not one-thousandth part of which has yet been brought to light by the cunning hand of the white adventuring prospector.

"I AM THE BOSS OF THIS TRAIL TO CRAZY CAMP, AND I AM THE MAN W'OT COLLECTS THE TOLL; SO SHEIL OUT."

To the southward rose the bold peaks of the Mogollon Mountains.

A wilder and more romantic country it would be hard to find in all of the far Western land.

The trail was but little more than a cattle path, and wound round among the rocks with all the crookedness of a serpent's path.

At this particular point there was a rude sort of a habitation.

A hole had been dug in a shelving bank, and a shanty erected in front of the hole, so that it was half house and half dug-out, as these caves are commonly called.

In front of the strange habitation stood the man with whose speech we commence our story.

He was a tall, angular fellow—a man of forty-five or fifty, with a face as hard as a pine knot, dressed in the style common to the frontier region, pantaloons of uncertain color, very much the worse for wear, tucked into clumsy boots, which looked as if it had been many a long day since they had felt the touch of a blacking-brush, a dirty flannel shirt and a slouch hat which long ago had lost what little shape it had ever possessed.

But contrary to the usual custom of the men of the wild West, this fellow wore a coat, a marvelous garment, for it was patched in a dozen different places, with all sorts of cloth, of all colors, and an extra tail had been sewn onto it, which came within a foot of the ground, and this peculiar garment, coupled with the rest of the man's appearance, made him as strange a looking figure as a man would be apt to see in a month's journey all along the line of the frontier.

The man to whom the odd speech was addressed, by the still odder speaker, was a traveler mounted on a stout horse, who had been coming quietly along the trail, when suddenly halted by the appearance of the man with the coat from the rude house.

The horseman was a powerfully-built fellow, with a stern, resolute face and an air which seemed to say that he was used to command.

He was so dark in color as to suggest that he was half-Indian; his hair, too, worn long, and brushed behind the ears, scout fashion, was jet-black, but his chin and upper lip were fringed with a short beard, fully as ebon in color as his hair.

The stranger reined in his horse upon being accosted by the man from the shanty, and regarded him in considerable surprise.

The horseman, by the way, was dressed in dark clothes—pantaloons and a short sack-coat, flannel shirt, and a broad-brimmed felt hat.

The belt which girted his muscular waist bore a full supply of arms, and the stranger looked like a man who was fully competent to use his weapons, too.

"What is the matter with you, my friend—why should I dismount?" the horseman inquired.

"Because I want you to—that is the how of it!" the other responded.

"Really, I reckon you'll have to excuse me," the stranger remarked, dryly.

"Say! you don't seem to understand that I am the boss of this road!" Then he hopped up and down, patted his hands on his side in imitation of a rooster flapping his wings and gave a loud crow.

"Well, you see I am a stranger in these parts, and so not acquainted with you and your claims."

"Oh, it won't take me long to introduce myself!" the nondescript cried. "My name is Kangaroo Tom—maybe you notice my kangaroo tail!" And then he squatted down, held his arms in front of him, dangling down after the fashion that a kangaroo carries his forelegs, and hopped up and down in such a ridiculous manner that the stranger could not forbear smiling.

"Oh, grin—grin all you like!" the other exclaimed, quick to notice the smile. "But unless I ain't the man I think I am I will make you grin on the other side of your mouth in about two wags of a lamb's tail!" And as he spoke he ceased his monkey shines and rose to an upright position again.

"What is the matter with you?" the horseman demanded. "Did you get out of bed on the right side this morning?"

"I rolled out at the foot, gol darn ye! and what business is it of yours, anyway?" the other cried in an extremely ugly manner.

"Ah, that accounts for it. If you had risen from your couch in a proper manner you would be in a better humor."

"Say, you talk so mighty fine that I reckon you must have swallowed a dictionary!" Kangaroo Tom growled, "but, as I said afore, I want you to understand that I am the boss of this trail to Crazy Camp, and I am the man w'ot collects the toll; so shell out."

"Oh, is it a toll road?" the horseman exclaimed in surprise. "Well, I never should have known it if you had not told me."

"You ought to have seen what the road was like afore I took hold of it!" Kangaroo Tom cried. "I tell you, stranger, many a hard days work I have put on the road and it is only fair now that you cusses w'ot use it should pony up!"

"What is the tariff?"

"Wa-al, that depends—it ranges all the way from two bits to a dollar—jist according to w'ot I think the man kin stand. Now, as you are inclined to be sassy I reckon I will charge you five dollars, so shell out!"

"Oh, no, I don't mind two bits: I will go that but no more," the horseman replied in a decided way.

"Well, then, 'light down, and try a fall with me!" Kangaroo Tom exclaimed, beginning to get wild again.

"That was my idee when I furst see'd you! You're a big chunk of a feller, and the moment I got my peepers on to you I sed to myself, sed I, hyer's the man w'ot I kin have some fun with right off the reel!"

"Oh, is that so?" the horseman asked, the suspicion entering his mind that the other was not quite right in the upper story.

"Yes, sir-ee! I'm the champion wrestler around these parts, and when a big cuss comes along and makes any objections to shelling out his ducats, I allers gr'n him a chance to 'light down and try a fall with me."

"If I can't git the money I go in for fun!"

"Well, as far as two bits goes—" the stranger said.

"Nary two bits!" howled the other. "You shuck five dollars out of your clothes or come off yer hoss and lemme twist yer heels up and plant yer head right in the center of the airth."

"I reckon I will have to see what you are made of in the wrestling line," the horseman observed, preparing to dismount. "For most certainly I do not feel inclined to give up five dollars; such a tax is out of all reason."

"I jest a' lief take it out of yer hide!" and the toll-gatherer executed a war-dance, springing up in the air, brandishing his fists and howling at the top of his lungs.

Suddenly he stopped and addressing the horseman, cried:

"Did you know that a kangaroo is the durnest animal to wrestle that was ever hatched? Talk about a b'ar show! go away! a b'ar ain't nowhere 'longside of a kangaroo, and I want you to understand that I am the king kangaroo too!" And then he squatted down and went through his ridiculous hops again.

The horseman comprehended that the man was not quite right in his head, but notwithstanding that, he did not see how he could avoid the wrestling match to which the other had challenged him.

Down he leaped then to the ground, turned his horse to one side to allow him to crop the scanty herbage growing by the wayside, and cried out:

"Well, stranger, since you are determined to find out what kind of a man I am I suppose I will have to gratify you."

Now that the stranger was on the ground it could be seen that he was a man fully six feet tall and magnificently built.

It is hard work to judge of a man when he is on horseback, for although the upper part of his figure may be all right, yet the lower may lack development as in the case of the horse Indians of the plains; they are fine-looking men when mounted, but when on the ground they present an odd appearance, having splendid chests and arms, but their lower limbs are shrunk and misshapen.

By the time that the stranger had dismounted, the toll-gatherer had risen to his feet again, and as the horseman turned he surveyed him with a deal of curiosity.

"Wa-al, now, come to get a fair look at you it is to be seen that you are a pretty sizable sort of a man!" the fellow exclaimed.

"Oh, yes, I was around when size was given out; I was not behind the door!" the horseman replied.

"But come, suppose you pitch in and begin this picnic since you are so anxious to discover what kind of a man I am. I am in a hurry to get to Crazy Camp and I cannot afford to waste much time with you."

"Oh, that is all right, you will git thar soon enough. It is only about two miles on, but they are a heap sizable miles; as the trail is so bad the cusses w'ot laid it out made up for it by making the miles extra long; give thundering good measure, you know."

"Say, w'ot might be your handle?"

"I am called John Randolph," the horseman replied.

"Randolph, hey?"

"Yes."

"And I reckon, too, that thar is considerable of the buck about you," and the toll-gatherer surveyed the other with a curious glance. "I should be willing to bet big odds that your mammy was an Injun gal."

"It is none of your business what my mother was," the horseman replied, shortly, as though he resented the inference.

"Sho! come, now, don't go to gitten buffy or I will have to slam you 'round twice as hard when I take hold on you!" the toll-gatherer warned in a very warlike way. "I want you to understand that I am a reg'lar old p'izen death when I git started and wade in."

"You are as big a blow-hard as I have met for a month of Sundays and I reckon that that

is about all that you amount to!" the horseman retorted.

"I'm coming now—look out for me!" and Kangaroo Tom began to skip and jump about.

"How will you have it—a fair nip-and-tuck or catch-as-catch-can?"

"Yes, any way that suits you will suit me!"

"Shall I slam you down and break yer back over a rock, or will you be stood on your head in the center of the airth?"

"Oh, pitch in and stop your blowing!" the other cried impatiently. "I am anxious to see if I cannot squeeze a little of the wind out of you."

"Look out for me! I'm a-coming—a reg'lar cyclone!" the toll-gatherer declared, and then he made a fierce rush at the horseman, but the other was evidently an experienced wrestler and skillfully evading the attempt of the toll-gatherer to secure an underhold, grappled with him.

The two men looked to be pretty evenly matched, but in reality Kangaroo Tom, although fully as tall as the horseman was thirty or forty pounds lighter, lacking the breadth of chest and iron-like muscles that the other possessed.

For a few moments the two swayed over the ground, Kangaroo Tom doing his best to break the advantageous hold that the other had secured, but he was powerless to contend with the superior force of his opponent.

There was a sudden jerk, the toll-gatherer was lifted from his feet, balanced for a moment on the hip of the horseman and then down he went with such tremendous force that the breath was about knocked out of his body, while his opponent stood over him, apparently none the worse for the exertion he had made.

"Great Scott!" gasped the downfallen man glaring up in the face of his antagonist, "wot are you about, anyway? Do you want to break my back that you swash me down in any sich onnery way as that?"

"Come, hop up lively, Kangaroo, and try another fall!" the horseman exclaimed. "I am just beginning to appreciate the fun."

"Come for me again and give me a chance to lay you out with a grape-vine twist!"

And the stranger brandished his muscular arms in the air as though he meant business and was eager for the fray.

"No, sir-ee!" Kangaroo Tom responded, rising to a sitting posture and beginning to rub his back ruefully.

"I don't want any more out of you! Any man who will slam me around the way you did without any regard for my feelings or my clothes is a good man for me to keep away from."

"You do not mean to say that you are satisfied with this little sort of a dog fall?" the horseman demanded, evidently much astonished.

"Dog fall do you call it?" Kangaroo Tom fairly howled. "Wa-al, maybe it was a dog fall, but I feel as if I had been foolin' with an elephant and the darned beast had fallen on me."

"You are willing to cry quits then?"

"Yas, go 'long with ye as quick as the Lord will let you!" the other snarled. "I don't want any toll out of you. I wouldn't take money from no sich man as you are, a-going round trying to break peaceable men's backs!"

"All right; I am satisfied if you are."

Then the horseman got on his steed again.

"But I must say, my friend, that I am rather disappointed," he continued, as he took up the reins. "I expected that you were something of a wrestler, but it is apparent that kangaroos are no good!"

And then he rode down the trail, leaving the toll-gatherer to rub his bruises and fill the air with violent exclamations.

CHAPTER II.

A PERILOUS POSITION.

THE horseman laughed grimly to himself as he rode on, the exclamations of the disgusted toll-gatherer growing fainter and fainter in his ears.

"This mining-town is known as Crazy Camp, and if this individual who resides in the neighborhood of it is a good specimen of the inhabitants of the place, I do not wonder at the name it bears," Randolph mused.

"I suppose the fellow is sane enough except on this one point," he continued, pursuing his meditations. "He certainly is no wrestler, although he is big and strong enough, but as he does not understand the first principles of the art, he was like a child in my hands."

"Perhaps I have given him a lesson which will do him good, and he will be more careful the future about how he challenges peaceable strangers."

"I do not doubt that the fellow will be soaled for some time, for I threw him a burster, and his knife released him from his hold on me. When freed solidly on hard ground, it is apt to knock the wind out of him in such a way as to hurt."

By this time the horseman had pushed his steed into a gentle gallop and was getting on the ground at a fair pace.

The trail ran around a big ledge of rocks entered a little open plain through which a mountain streamlet ran.

The old man

look of astonish

And as Randolph rode into the valley a strange sight met his eyes.

Fifty feet from the trail in the center of a little open grassy space a blasted oak tree arose.

It had once been a goodly sight, for it was larger than the oaks which are usually to be met with in this region, but lightning had stricken the tree and destroyed the entire upper part of it so that naught but the blackened trunk, ten or twelve feet high, remained.

To the trunk of the tree a woman was bound.

She stood with her back to it, her arms were carried around it and tightly lashed with a lariat, her ankles too were bound and the lariat passed around the tree, and a broad leather belt was buckled around her body, just under her arms, passing also around the tree, and this belt held her firmly in place.

She was a young and pretty girl, a brunette with coal-black eyes and hair, and was dressed in a neat dark green cloth riding-habit, but rather short in the skirt as was necessary in such a region as this where the woods were so rough and there were so many brambles and trees to bid the rider "wait a bit."

The girl was insensible and her head drooped upon her bosom as a lily bud rudely handled by careless fingers.

Then there was another figure in the scene.

A dozen paces from the girl seated upon the grass, was a venerable-looking old man with long iron-gray hair and a streaming beard of the same hue.

He was dressed in a suit of buckskin very much the worse for wear; it was gayly ornamented with colored ribbons, dingy and dirty, attached to the garments in many odd ways.

This gave the old fellow a peculiar fantastical appearance.

He had a huge bowie-knife in his hand and another was stuck in the turf by his side.

As the horseman came upon the scene the old man was busily engaged in cutting the small tree limb into pieces about a foot long and these he was carefully sharpening at one end.

He did not manifest any surprise when the horseman came round the bend in the trail, but looked up and saluted him with a courtly bow, still keeping on however with his task of sharpening the sticks.

"What in the name of all that is wonderful is the meaning of this?" Randolph exclaimed as he advanced to within a yard of the old man and brought his horse to a halt.

"Ah, good-morning, you need not have hurried yourself, there is plenty of time," the old man said with a polite bow. "The performance will not begin until all the preparations are complete."

Then the stranger, glancing around, noticed a spotted Indian pony peacefully grazing by the stream a hundred yards away.

This was evidently the horse which had been ridden by the girl now bound to the tree-trunk.

From the peculiar way in which the old man spoke Randolph got the idea that he was a mania, and it struck him that it was very odd that after getting through with one lunatic he should so soon encounter another.

"What is the meaning of this? Do you want to kill the girl?" the horseman demanded sternly. "Take her down from that tree at once or I will put a bullet through your skull!"

And to give due weight to the words Randolph drew one of his revolvers from his belt and leveled it at the head of the other.

They were self-cocking tools and so ready for action.

"That is a very good trick, too," observed the old man in a serious, thoughtful way, and not seeming to be at all disturbed by the sight of the leveled pistol.

"I think that would be very well for the second piece on the programme, and with your aid I do not doubt one can make a big thing out of it."

"You fire the pistol at me; I catch the bullet in my teeth, and there you are!"

The horseman saw that the man was so utterly deranged that it was useless to attempt to either reason or threaten him, so he went on another tack.

"I can show you a good trick, too. Just watch me!"

Then shifting his pistol to his left hand, he rode up to the tree, drawing the bowie-knife as he did so.

As he came to a halt, the girl opened her eyes and looked around her with a startled gaze.

Then, as her eyes fell upon the face and form of the stranger, she cried aloud in joy:

"Oh, merciful Heaven be thanked!" she exclaimed. "You have come in time to save me!"

"Yes, that is true!" And then the horseman

leaped to the ground, and with a few slashes of his knife released the girl from the bonds which

bound her to the tree.

When freed the girl would have fallen, she

was so weak, had not the horseman placed his

strong arm around her waist, and supported her

to a boulder which cropped out of the earth a

couple of yards away, forming a convenient

seat.

The old man suspended his work, and with a

look of astonishment on his face, asked:

"Now, what in the world did you do that for? What an extremely stupid thing to do! We will have all the trouble of tying her up again!"

Then he resumed work on the sticks.

After Randolph placed the girl on the rock, he found that she was not able to support herself without the aid of his arm.

In this emergency he judged that she needed a stimulant.

As it happened, he had a small flask of brandy in his pocket; it was a regular traveler's flask, with a cup on the bottom.

He poured a little of the brandy into the bottom of the cup, and pressed it to the lips of the girl.

"Here, miss, drink this, and it will be apt to make you feel better."

She swallowed the generous liquid, and the stimulant revived her.

"Oh, thanks!" she murmured; "you are so very kind! I feel that I owe you my life."

"Tell the particulars: how comes it that you were in such a horrible plight?" Randolph asked in a low tone, so as to keep the old man from hearing what he said.

"It was all the doing of that terrible old man," she replied, also speaking in a low and cautious tone.

"He is a lunatic, I should judge," the horseman remarked.

"Yes, but he has never been regarded as dangerous," the girl replied.

"Ah, that is one of the things that no one can tell anything about. It is always the supposed-to-be harmless madmen who do the damage. They are harmless until a violent crazy streak sets in, and then they are not."

"I was riding along on my pony, totally unsuspecting of danger, when a lariat was thrown over my head, and I was dragged from the saddle; I had been lassoed just like a wild horse."

"The shock of the fall stunned me, and I suppose I must have fainted. Anyway I do not know what occurred until I recovered my senses, a few moments ago, and found myself bound to the tree. Then when I saw that horrible old man, I guessed that he was the one who assailed me, for he has often told me in a joking way that he was going to lasso me some day, but I did not believe that he had any idea of doing such a thing."

"Oh, it is just as I tell you about these harmless madmen, they will all bear watching," Randolph remarked.

"Come, now, you might as well tie her up again, for we are all ready to begin," the old man said abruptly.

"Begin!" Randolph exclaimed, while the girl clung convulsively to him as if for protection, "begin what?"

"The performance! How stupid you are!" the old man exclaimed in a petulant way.

"What kind of a performance? I don't understand what you are driving at."

"Is it possible that you don't know?"

"No, how should I? I never saw you before."

"That may be, but my reputation is world-wide, and I fancied that everybody knew it," and the old man wagged his head in a solemn way.

"Well, I do not."

"I must introduce myself, then."

"Yes, if you want me to know who you are."

"Years ago I was called the Wandering Jew, but I grew tired of that appellation, and took upon myself a more modern shape. For the last two hundred years I have been known as Jocrisse, the Juggler, and I am world-famous."

"Ah, yes, I see," the horseman remarked, pleasantly, while the girl listened with distended eyes.

"I used to predict the future, but I grew tired of that sort of business; there are so many in the same line now; but they are all frauds; I am the only original Jacobs."

"Of course; 'Don't go to the other swindler on the opposite side of the way—come right in here,'" Randolph exclaimed, in a jocular way.

"Some of these ignorant miners make mouths at me, and deride my powers, so I concluded I would get up an exhibition with the aid of this young lady here which would be apt to astonish them."

"Well, you have succeeded in astonishing the young lady even if the miners will not have it," the horseman remarked, dryly.

"You know this young lady, of course?" said the old man, speaking as sensibly as though he was as sane as any man in the world.

"No, I regret to say that I do not, but that is because I am a stranger in this section."

"How may I call your name?"

"John Randolph."

"Mr. Randolph, allow me to have the pleasure of presenting you to Miss Margaret High-card, only daughter of Daddy High-card, one of the representative citizens of Crazy Camp."

"Delighted at the pleasure I am sure," declared the horseman, humoring the old man, while the girl simply stared at him with parted lips and distended eyes, strangely putting Randolph in mind of a bird fascinated by a serpent.

"The first thing on the programme was the knife trick," the old man explained. "That was

why Miss Margaret was tied to the tree. She is new in the business, and it takes some little time to get used to it, you know."

"Yes, I should say so."

"And then it takes nerve, too, you understand, to be placed against a board and see the glittering knives come whizzing through the air, seemingly as if the keen blades were aimed at your heart."

This was too much for the girl's nerves, shattered as they were by the trying experience through which she had gone, so she gave a little shriek and covered her face with her hands.

"It is all right, don't be alarmed!" Randolph exclaimed.

"You see that I was wise to tie her," the old man remarked, in the gravest possible manner. "She would never stand the ordeal unless she was tied."

"Do you mean to say that you tied this young lady up to the tree with the idea of throwing knives at her?" Randolph demanded.

"Not at her—the knives encircle her, so to speak. Haven't you ever seen the marvelous act performed?"

And then suddenly there came to the mind of the horseman a knowledge of what the old lunatic intended to do.

In a theater once he had witnessed a knife-throwing act.

A woman dressed in a fanciful costume was placed against a broad board where she stood with outstretched arms.

Then her partner with wonderful dexterity sent heavy bowie-knives whirling through the air.

A couple stuck in the board on each side of her outstretched arms, two more guarded her taper waist, another pair quivered in the wood by the side of her cheeks.

It was a most dangerous feat, for any want of skill on the part of the thrower of the knives would send them ruthlessly into the flesh of the target, and turn the feat of skill into a fearful tragedy.

As it happened the girl had witnessed just such a performance, and it was little wonder that when the words of the madman brought the scene again to her mind, she closed her eyes, as if she could thus dismiss the horrid subject.

"And you tied Miss Margaret here to the tree, with the idea of trying your skill upon her?" the horseman exclaimed.

"Yes, this was to be a sort of rehearsal, you know. I am a little rusty, and I wanted to get my hand in again before I gave a regular performance."

"I used to be very expert at it. I remember that I performed the feat once in Paris, before the great Napoleon, just before he set out on that fatal Russian campaign, and he was graciously pleased to compliment me in the highest manner."

"I don't believe the men in this section would care for it, though," Randolph remarked, trying to see if he could be led away from the idea.

"Oh, yes, they would appreciate it, although they are a lot of dull, common, ignorant brutes; but as it is a semi-barbarous spectacle, it would be sure to appeal to their brutal instincts."

"I ought to have about a dozen knives, you know," the old man continued. "But these two were all I was able to get, and I suppose I went into twenty cabins this morning before I found these."

"All the miners have knives, you understand, but as they make a practice of wearing them while at work, it wasn't possible for me to get any more; still, as knives are essential, I concluded to sharpen some sticks and make them do for knives."

"Oh, isn't it dreadful?" the girl exclaimed in an undertone to the horseman.

"Yes, and it is a lucky thing that I happened to come along as I did," Randolph replied.

"And now suppose you put the young lady back where you found her so I can go in with the performance," the old man said in a fretful way.

"Oh, no, she does not want to take a part. It is out of her line. You must get some one else," the horseman remarked.

The old man looked annoyed and shook his head in a petulant way.

"It is very foolish of her not to be glad of a chance to become famous!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, but you see she does not covet the honor of becoming a public character," Randolph answered.

"Well, I did not think it wise to consult her about the subject for I know enough about women to understand that they have some very strange ideas, and seldom are inclined to listen to reason, but I thought that when she comprehended the fame which awaited her she might be willing to comply with my wishes."

"And that is the reason you lassoed her, eh?" the horseman inquired.

"You thought that she would not be willing to consent and so you made up your mind to fix the matter so that she would have to take part whether she was willing or not."

"Yes, that was my idea," the old man admitted readily enough, and it was plain his wits

had been

working

hard

to

bring

about

the

were so disordered that he was not conscious there was anything wrong in his proceeding.

"Well, you see how the case stands," the horseman remarked. "She doesn't wish to take part in the performance and you will have to get somebody else, and that is all there is to it."

"Of course, since you have interfered in the matter I do not presume I will be able to do anything with the young lady, but it is a great pity for we would have made a strong team. I can find some other girl, I presume, although women are scarce in this section, but I will look for one."

Then the old man gathered up his knives, stuck them in the rope which he had tied around his waist in place of a belt, then did the same with the sticks which he had sharpened and arising to his feet marched off down the trail, which he only followed until he came to the end of the valley, then he struck off toward the foot-hills and soon disappeared amid the bushes which grew so plentifully around the rugged rocks.

The girl had followed his movements with dilated eyes, and when he vanished from sight, a long breath, evidently indicative of great relief escaped from her lips.

CHAPTER III. HER FATHER.

RANDOLPH too had watched the old man until he disappeared and then turned his gaze upon the girl. Noticing the expression of relief upon her face, he said:

"I judge that you are not sorry to see him depart."

"Oh, no, indeed I am not!" she exclaimed. "I have always had the reputation of being a rather self-willed, reliant girl, who had so much courage that she was not afraid to trust herself anywhere, but I have got a fright to-day which will last me for one while, and if anybody tells me in the future that I do not seem to know the meaning of the word fear, I shall be obliged to tell them they are greatly mistaken."

"It would be a great wonder if you had not been frightened when the circumstances are considered," the horseman remarked. "I bear the reputation of being a tolerably courageous man myself, but I think if I had been treated to any such surprise party as this lunatic sprung on you I should have been obliged to be a little uneasy."

"And it is so strange, too, that the man should take such a notion into his head," the girl declared.

"He has always been considered to be harmless, and I don't believe there is a single person in the camp who believed there was any harm in him."

"Is this idea of wanting to become a public performer a new thing?"

"Oh, no; he has always called himself Jocrisse, the Juggler, and he does a few simple tricks which the miners pretend to think are very wonderful, and they give the old man a little money after he finishes his performance."

"Yes, I understand; they make a sort of a butt of him."

"Exactly! There is not much in the amusement line going on in the camp, and I suppose the miners are glad of a chance to have sport with this poor old fellow."

"From this time forth, though I don't doubt that you will keep a wary eye upon him," Randolph observed.

"Oh, I guess I will!" the girl exclaimed.

"I am generally on my guard, for I am used to the frontier, and although I had no idea that I was likely to encounter any danger, yet I usually keep my eyes open, but on this occasion I was riding along in a sort of a brown study, and so I was surprised, but no such thing could happen again!" and the bright eyes of the girl snapped as she made the declaration.

"Once caught, then shy, eh?" Randolph exclaimed with a laugh.

"Yes, that is about the idea. I shall never allow myself to fall into a musing fit again when riding along a desolate trail."

"The old man managed the capture, too, in a very cunning way," the girl continued.

"He was behind a big rock yonder on the trail, and as the rock was on a bank, higher than my horse's back, he was able to drop the lasso over me without having to exert much skill in the rope-throwing line."

It is well for him too that he did take me by surprise and in such a way that I was not able to defend myself, for if I had had any chance for my life I would not have tamely submitted to be treated in such a way."

"I am armed"—and the girl showed Randolph a small revolver which she carried in a little pocket just below her waist—"and you can rest assured that in such an emergency as this I should not have hesitated to have used my weapon."

"It is lucky for the lunatic then that he took you by surprise."

"Yes, for he would have suffered if he had attempted to attack me openly."

"You see, sir, I am a Western girl. I was born and brought up on the frontier and have always lived all my life on the verge of civilization, so a peril of this kind does not seem so

strange to me as it undoubtedly would under other circumstances."

"From your conversation no one would be apt to imagine that you had been denied the advantages of a thickly-settled community," Randolph remarked.

"You are very kind to say so," the girl replied with a graceful little bow. "But I believe that it is a fact that in education and general deportment I compare favorably with the Eastern girls who have been brought up in cities, where it is not a difficult matter for the poorest to enjoy the advantages which even the richest cannot purchase in a country like this. But that, you see, is coming to the fact that my father is an educated man and he has taken great pains with me."

"He has always impressed it upon me that I was to be brought up like a lady, and as I have a kind, good father whom I dearly love, I have always done my best to deserve his praise."

"I am sure you do credit to his teachings."

Again the girl made her graceful little bow and a slight tinge of color appeared in her cheeks.

"I am afraid that you are something of a flatterer!" she declared.

"Oh, no, I am only saying the honest truth. No one, after conversing with you, would be apt to think that you had not enjoyed all the advantages that a highly cultured community could give."

"That is owing to the care which my father has taken of me," she explained. "As I told you, he has a fine education, and then he has been a great traveler, having visited almost all the lands of the old world; so, in addition to book knowledge, he has that practical wisdom which contact with the world gives."

"Such an education is far superior to that which comes from books alone."

"So my father says. And then when he traveled abroad, he did not go merely for the pleasure of traveling, passing rapidly through the various countries, without stopping long enough to become acquainted with the people, or their manners and customs; on the contrary, he made a regular business trip, and in pursuit of that business stopped quite a long time in all the principal cities."

"That, of course, gave him an opportunity to become well acquainted with the different people."

"Yes, my father says that it is not possible for a stranger passing rapidly through the various countries to really learn anything of value concerning them or their people."

"Undoubtedly that is the truth!" Randolph declared. "What business did your father follow that he was able to make the trip in this way?"

"Oh, the same business that he is in now. I presume that you are a stranger in this section?"

"Yes, I am."

"From the East?"

"I come from St. Louis."

"Then, of course, you are not acquainted with any of the prominent men in this section."

"No, I am not."

"I thought as much, for if you were posted, you surely would have known something about my father, Daddy High-card, as he is commonly called."

"Yes, if I had ever heard the name, I would have been apt to remember the circumstance, for it is a very strange name."

"It is a nickname," the girl explained.

"It is a common custom for these miners to call almost everybody by some nickname, and as my father is a gambler by profession, and a very successful one, he got the name of High-card Johnson—Joseph Johnson is his right name—and then by degrees, people got to calling him Daddy High-card; I suppose that is because he has a long white beard and his hair is also white, although he is not an old man, but right in the prime of life. His hair and beard are prematurely white on account of a severe fever which he had when he was about forty years old."

The girl spoke of her father's occupation in the most matter-of-fact way, not seeming to be aware that there was anything discreditable in the profession which he followed.

"Yes, I have noticed since coming to the mining regions that the inhabitants are greatly given to the use of nicknames," Randolph remarked.

"You are going to Crazy Camp I presume?"

"Yes, I am looking for a likely place to locate and have been advised that this town bids fair to be a prosperous one."

"Oh, it is about the same as all the rest," the girl replied. "If you will listen to the tales the inhabitants tell, the particular town to which they belong, according to their story, is going to be the one great town of the section, but when you come to look into the truth of the claim you will find that one camp does not possess much advantage over another, and it would be a wise man indeed who could predict which town will be ahead ten years from now."

"I do not doubt the truth of that assertion."

"You see, I am well-posted," the girl remarked. "I have lived with my father in a dozen of these towns in the last ten years and so have got to be a pretty good judge."

"Of course you understand that his business depends upon the prosperity of the camp. If the inhabitants are not doing well he cannot hope to make anything."

"That follows naturally," the horseman responded, rather amused at the business-like way in which the girl discussed the matter.

"I do not doubt though that you will do as well in Crazy Camp as at any of the other towns," the girl observed. "My father manages to make a good living, but that is all; still he is one of the kind of men who would be apt to get along almost anywhere for he is a regular Jack-of-all-trades."

"A man so gifted may consider himself fortunate!" Randolph averred.

"And then, too, my father is very lucky, and, as a rule, is successful in most of his undertakings."

"Better to be born lucky than rich, they say," the horseman remarked with a smile.

"Yes, I believe there is a deal of truth in that saying. I have often heard my father declare there was," the girl returned. "And since you think of locating in Crazy Camp, my father will be able to give you good advice, for he is as well-posted in regard to the town and people as anybody you can find. He has to be, you know, or he would not be able to get along in his business."

"Yes, I suppose so."

"And when I tell him how you rescued me from the hands of this madman he will be delighted to do all he can for you."

"Oh, you need not trouble yourself to mention that," Randolph replied. "I only did what any man would have done under the circumstances."

"Well, that may be true, but I consider that I owe my life to you and I shall not be satisfied until I find some way to repay the service."

"You need not allow the obligation to worry you any!" the horseman declared.

Then he assisted the girl to catch her horse, which was not a difficult matter, for the beast did not attempt to escape; she mounted to the saddle, he resumed his seat upon the back of his steed, and then the two rode to Crazy Camp in company.

During the ride the pair chatted upon various subjects of no particular interest to the reader, so we will not detail the conversation.

It was only a short distance to the town and when the pair arrived at the summit of the last hill, they commanded a view of the town down in the valley beneath.

Crazy Camp was situated on the banks of the same mountain stream which ran through the rocky valley where the madman had entrapped the girl.

It was a small place, not over a hundred houses all told, and, counting the outlying cabins in the neighboring gulches could boast of about four hundred people, as Miss Margaret informed the stranger.

"Well, I presume that a town of four hundred inhabitants can be considered to be quite a place as towns go in a country like this," Randolph remarked.

"If you could hear some of the people of the camp talk you would imagine that the place had four thousand instead of four hundred," the girl declared.

Then she pointed out the hotel to him; it was the largest building in the place, and situated in the center of the town.

"It is called the Washington House and is kept by Mr. Thomas Blockford, a very nice man indeed, so fat and jolly, and as he is such a large man almost everybody calls him Fat Tom."

"Quite an appropriate name for the keeper of a hotel, for it seems to promise that his guests will not be starved."

"Oh, he treats his boarders well. I presume you will stop there?"

"Yes, I suppose it is the best place in the camp."

"It is the only respectable place," the girl replied. "There are some others but they are mean, low dens. Father and I board at the hotel and so I know just what kind of a place it is."

"I shall try it then upon your recommendation."

"You will find it as good as the average mining-camp hotel."

By this time the two had reached the town and as they rode along the single street which was all that the town boasted, Randolph remarked that the camp seemed to be deserted.

"About all of the men are at work in the gulches on the outskirts of the town," Miss Margaret explained.

"They leave the camp early in the morning and do not return until supper-time, but at night you will find the town lively enough, and the hotel is the general resort."

"Yes, I have found that to be the case in all these mining-camps."

When the pair rode up to the hotel, a portly, well-dressed gentleman, with flowing white hair and a long beard of the same hue, who had been reading a newspaper in the saloon of the hotel, which was on the right of the entranceway, came forth; when he saw him the horseman

concluded from the description that the girl had given, that he was her father, and so it proved.

Miss Margaret introduced her parent, who, from his mild and benevolent appearance, would be far more likely to be taken for a minister than for a man who made a living by manipulating the painted paste-boards.

After the introduction, she explained how it was that she had happened to become acquainted with the gentleman.

Daddy High-card shook his head after the tale was told.

"I had a notion for some time that the old fellow would be apt to become dangerous, for I have not liked the way he has been acting."

"If he tries any more tricks of this kind, I shall have to get the boys to introduce him to Judge Lynch."

Despite his white hair and beard, there was none of the decrepitude of age about the sport, and there were signs in his face, too, which told that he was a man of firm resolution.

With a polite "good-day" to the horseman, Miss Margaret entered the hotel by the private entrance and disappeared from view.

Her father took the horse to the hotel corral, whither Randolph also proceeded.

After the horses were turned over to the care of the hostler, the pair entered the hotel, where Daddy High-card introduced the stranger to the landlord, who presided behind the bar, and explained how he had happened to make the acquaintance of his daughter.

"Gol darn me! if that wasn't a narrow squeeze for the gal!" the fat landlord exclaimed in amazement.

"I told this gentleman that for some time I have not liked the way this old rascal has been acting, and had a notion that he would get ugly, sooner or later," the sport said.

"Yes, I have had my eyes on him too!" the landlord exclaimed with a wise shake of the head. "I reckon the camp will have to present him with a hempen necktie before long."

Then Daddy High-card insisted upon the stranger taking a drink with him, including the landlord in the invitation.

All three were temperate men and so they took ale, and after it was drank, the sport and the stranger took seats by the window in the corner, the landlord having assigned Randolph a room and taken his pay for a week in advance, after the custom of the mining region.

"I am very much obliged to you, sir, for the service which you rendered my girl," the old sport said. "And if there is anything I can do to aid you in any way I shall be pleased to do it."

"Oh don't mention it!" Randolph replied. "I am only too glad that I was able to perform the slight service."

"That is all right, of course, but I shall be obliged to consider myself your debtor until I can find some way to square the account."

"I shall be pleased to get some advice from you if you don't mind giving it."

"Not at all—not at all!" the old sport responded, heartily. "On the contrary I shall be glad of the chance. Speak freely and you can depend upon it that I will do the best I can for you."

"I have come to this region with the idea of speculating a little," Randolph explained. "I understood that there was some chance for a man in this district to make money if he happened to hit upon the right thing."

"Do you mean in the mining line?"

"Yes."

"Well—excuse the question, but have you any experience in that line?"

"None at all."

"You will have to keep your eyes open then or you will be gouged in the worst kind of way!" the old sport declared.

"I presume that I shall have to exercise due caution, of course."

"Oh, yes! All the mining-camps are full of sharks eager and anxious to make a stake out of any stranger who comes along."

"In fact, I suppose I may be classed with the sharks myself," Daddy High-card said with a quiet laugh.

"From your appearance I should never have suspected such a thing."

"No, I am aware that I do not look much like a sport, yet I am, so you see that in my case appearances are deceptive."

"Yes, you look more like a lawyer, or a doctor, than a man who depends upon cards and dice for a living," Randolph remarked.

"That is, I mean according to the popular idea. As far as I am concerned I understand that sporting men do not go about wearing signs of their occupation in their faces and appearance so that he who runs may read."

"That is true enough, but, as you say, it is the common belief that they do. Of course, there is a class of young sports, usually to be found in big cities, the dyed mustache, flashy jewelry fellows who manage to advertise their occupation by their outward appearance pretty well, but when it comes to the regular sport, the big men in the business, for the flashy fellows are only small fry, as a rule they always try to dress

as quietly as possible, and keep in the background so as not to attract attention."

"Yes, I know that to be a fact, for I have met both the small fry, flashy sports, and the big solid men of the business."

"I was born and brought up in the East but an unfortunate quarrel one night forced me to seek the seclusion that the wild West affords," the old sport explained. "It was the old story, I had to settle my man, or he would have settled me, and as I am pretty quick on the 'draw' I got the best of the fight."

"It was a very unfortunate affair for me, though, and I anticipated the end right in the beginning, but there was no way to get out of the matter."

"My antagonist was the black sheep of a good family, and I understood that if I damaged him I would probably be hounded in the most unmerciful manner, and it was just as I anticipated."

"By a prompt flight I succeeded in escaping and coming West."

"The affair happened over twenty years ago, and as the men who hounded me, and the witnesses who could prove that I was the man who committed the act, are all dead and gone, I could return to the East without fear of being troubled, but I have got so used to the West that I don't care to leave it, and I shall probably live and die here."

"But I am wearying you with my affairs, which are, of course, of no interest to you; I am an old man, you see, and inclined to be talkative," the old sport remarked, with a quiet laugh.

CHAPTER IV.

GOOD ADVICE.

"YOUR story is a decidedly interesting one," Randolph remarked. "There is no story more interesting to me than that of human nature, and to meet a man like yourself in a rough and rude country of this kind, is decidedly pleasant, for I can see that though your mode of life would be considered a little irregular in the East, yet in spite of that fact you are a man of breeding and education."

"I am very much obliged to you for the compliment," the old sport responded with a stately bow.

"But you are right in assuming that I was born a gentleman, and had the advantage of a good education; when I was a young man, though, I was a wild blade, and ran around a great deal more than was good for me, but if it had not been for this unfortunate quarrel I should probably have settled down in time, and become a respectable member of society, but fate decided otherwise."

"Although I came of a good family, it was not a wealthy one, and when I came to the West, I was thrown entirely on my own resources."

"Before that time I had played cards for amusement only, and although I was a skillful and successful player, yet I never thought of making a business of it, and becoming a professional, until I found myself in the mining region among strangers with very little money in my pocket and no means of obtaining employment."

"Under such circumstances as that a man might be pardoned for turning his hand to almost anything," Randolph remarked.

"Yes, I was so situated that I had to fall back on card-playing for a living, although it was with a deal of reluctance that I went into it."

"You see I had to contend with the prejudice which education instilled into me. It is all right for gentlemen to play cards for money for amusement—to pass the time away—the small stake serving to make the game interesting, that is the usual excuse for that sort of thing, you know, but for a man to set out to get his living by playing cards—to become a professional gambler—is something really awful."

"Yes, it is true that that is the way public opinions regards the matter, but it is absurd to take such a view of it, in my opinion," the other remarked.

"The man who plays cards for money is a gambler, and the amateur is every bit as bad as the professional; in fact, I have serious doubts if he is not worse, for if he has a business to support him he has not even the excuse of the professional that he plays cards that he may be able to live."

"That is about the way I figure it out," the old sport observed. "Of course two wrongs do not make one right, and because the business man gambles, it does not prove that gambling is not an evil practice."

"Yet, when you come to reflect upon it, a great deal of the so-called business of this world is nothing but gambling, pure and simple," Randolph declared.

"Oh, yes, no doubt about that!" Daddy High-card exclaimed. "The Stock Exchange business, for instance, where men buy what they do not want, and never expect to get, from others who sell what they do not possess and never will have."

"You are right; it isn't anything but gambling, and in nine cases out of ten the outsider

who tries to speculate by really betting—for it is betting and nothing else—that stocks, or corn, or cotton will be higher or lower in a certain time in the future, is playing with 'stacked cards'; he is bucking against a bank which will ring in a cold deal on him every time."

"That is true; the outsider stands no chance when he tries to contend with the big operators who are on the inside."

"My daughter has got this all down fine," the old sport explained.

"Her mother died when she was seven years old, and I brought her up. I didn't want her to be ashamed of her old father on account of the way he got his living, so I took pains to present the matter to her in the proper light, and as she got older she became interested, and studied the subject very closely; and the conclusion to which she came was that gambling was not such a dreadful thing as some people tried to make it out, when the condition of the world at large was taken into consideration."

"If the world was all right, it would be a very different matter, but when she looks around her and sees that the very men who are howling the loudest against the 'miserable gamblers,' are doing their best to get ahead of their fellows by using all sorts of mean tricks, then she is led to doubt whether the men who denounce are any better than those at whom they point the finger of scorn."

"Then, too, according to the notions that prevail in the wild West, gambling is not considered to be a crime, and the gamester is looked upon to be just as good as any other man, if he behaves himself."

"Yes, I am aware of that," Randolph remarked.

"Now, I bear as good a reputation as any man in this section, although everybody knows how I get my living," the old sport remarked. "Still, although I am a professional gambler, I always try to remember that I am a gentleman, and endeavor to treat everybody I come in contact with as well as I know how."

"The common idea that the so-called good people of this world entertain of the gambler is that he is a big human spider, who is continually laying in wait for flies—poor innocent dupes whom he entices into his den so that he may rob them."

"Of course there are vulgar ruffians—regular thieves and robbers—who do try a game of that sort, but you take a regular first-class sport, and you will find that it is the outsiders who run after him—not he after them; they are anxious to get his money, and if they are fools enough to think that they can beat a man at his own game, and come out of the little end of the horn, minus their cash, my opinion is that the verdict should be: 'Served them right!'"

"Oh, I have no sympathy for the men who try to win the sport's money, and then complain if they fail, and lose their own!" the other declared.

"But here we are talking about my affairs when we started in to discuss yours," Daddy High-card remarked.

"You say you want to speculate in the mining line?"

"Yes, I came to this place with that intention."

"Well, if you propose to buy a claim you must be careful to keep your eyes open," the old sport declared.

"The camp is filled with men who have mines to sell, more or less developed, but you can bet your bottom dollar that not one out of a hundred is worth a red cent!"

"I presume not, for a man with a really valuable claim would not be anxious to sell, for if he was without means to work the mine, if he was able to show that the ore was good, he would be certain to get partners with money to take an interest."

"Oh, yes, that is the truth!" the old sport replied.

"Although this is the wild and woolly West, you can depend upon it that good things don't go a-begging here any more than they do in the 'effete East,'" the old sport continued.

"If a man has a good claim, and can show that it will pan out well, he will not have any trouble in finding plenty of men with money who will be glad to go in with him and furnish the working capital."

"I should suppose that to be true."

"But the trouble is, you see, that there are dozens of men in the camp who have holes in the ground which they call mines, but either there isn't any gold there, or it is in such a state that it will cost more than the gold is worth to get it out."

"Those fellows are all anxious to sell, or they will take a partner—in fact, they will be glad to make almost any kind of an arrangement, provided there is a chance for them to get hold of some cash."

"And about all of them will show you a statement from an assayer, who has tested the ore, wherein it is gravely set down that the ore will run so many dollars to the ton, and the amount is always a good big one too."

"I understand that some of these experts' reports are not worth the paper they are written on."

"No, sir, they are not by a jugful!" Daddy High-card exclaimed.

"Why, I know of a trick that some of the boys played on an assayer in a camp where I pitched my tent for a while. They smashed up a piece of a grindstone, and sent it to him, and his report came back that it would run two hundred dollars to the ton in gold!"

And the old sport indulged in a hearty laugh.

"Well, his value as an expert was not great."

"No, but if you buy a mine on the strength of some assayer's statement as to the value of the ore, how can you tell but what you are getting fooled as badly as this expert was with the grindstone?"

"It is not possible to tell unless you are personally acquainted with the expert, and know that he is a first-class man whose statements can be depended upon."

"Oh, in that case you would be safe, of course."

"Well, I am not thinking of investing in a mine, so that none of these would-be sharpers will get a chance to swindle me," Randolph remarked.

"What I thought of doing was to get some experienced man to go in with me in a prospecting tour."

"Ah, yes, I see, go in on the grub-stake scheme. That is, you pay all the expenses of the trip for a share in whatever discoveries may be made."

"Yes, that is my idea."

"You will not find any difficulty in getting plenty of men to go in with you!" the old sport declared. "In fact, as soon as it is known around town that you are willing to do such a thing, you will have them tumbling over each other in their eagerness to make an arrangement with you."

"Yes, but in regard to the man I want the advice of somebody like yourself, who is posted. I don't want to take any man unless I am sure he is a good one."

"Of course, that is the only way for you to do, for otherwise you would only waste your time and money."

"I understand that, and if I cannot get a good man, there is little use of my going."

"You are right about that, and even if you got an extra good man, there is no certainty that you will be able to hit anything; it is the most uncertain kind of a lottery. I have known men—good men, too—to hunt year after year without striking any big lead. Once in a while they would hit upon some small lodes, which they would sell for a little money, so they would be able to go on, and thus went along, hoping that they would strike something big every day."

"Yes, I understand that it is, as you say, a regular lottery, with a thousand blanks to every prize, but I intend to try my luck, even if I do waste a little money; the only thing that troubles me is to find a good prospector. I want a man who is thoroughly acquainted with the country, and whom I can depend upon; a square, honest fellow, who can be trusted."

"Well, let me see," said the old sport, slowly and reflectively.

"There are plenty of men in the camp who would be glad to go, but it is not easy to pick out a man from the number whom I would feel safe in recommending."

Then the old sport remained silent for a few moments, evidently trying to remember some man who would answer.

"I have got him!" he exclaimed, abruptly, at last. "Just the man. Injun Pete!"

"An Indian?"

"No, that is only a name he has got, because he is almost as dark as a red-skin; but he is the clear, white article, and no mistake!"

"He was in town two days ago, and struck me for a stake, which I let him have, for I know Pete is a good, square fellow, and that I can depend upon him to make it good one of these days."

"He told me then that he had been playing in hard luck for some time, but was in hopes to make a strike soon. He wanted me to go in with him on the grub-stake plan, but I replied that I reckoned he would have to excuse me."

"You, see, I have been bit to the tune of about five hundred dollars, counting all the times I have been persuaded by some fellow to go in with him on that racket, and I made up my mind I would not throw away any more money in that way."

"Well, I don't blame you under the circumstances. Such a run of ill-luck would be apt to make a man discouraged."

"Yes, I don't think my luck was that way," the old sport observed. "As I said, I have put up almost five hundred dollars—really I think over five hundred rather than under—and never struck it once. No, sir, not once! Not a solitary dollar did I ever get back!"

"No wonder you did not want to go in."

"But if I had not made up my mind, and firmly resolved to stick to it, I reckon Injun Pete would have got a stake of a hundred or so out of me, for the old fellow was so dead certain he was going to strike it this time that he was really eloquent when he laid out the programme for me."

"You see he has a bad attack of the Lost Mine fever—got it on the brain, you might say."

"The Lost Mine?"

"Yes, is that yarn new to you?"

"Well, no, it seems to me that I have heard something about a Lost Mine in my travels."

"The tale is common all over the West. I have heard it in a dozen places, and each yarn locates the mine in a different locality."

"This Lost Mine, you must understand, is of wonderful richness. It was originally worked by the Indians, who, with their rude tools, took out the gold, which lies in such masses that it does not require smelting, and the red-skins made bracelets and such like trinkets of the metal."

"That was away back before the Spaniards came."

"Yes, I comprehend."

"These doughty Spanish warriors had a keen scent after gold, and after they conquered Mexico a small force found their way up into this country, where they discovered the mine, but they were not prepared for gold digging—the tools which they had with them were not much better than the Indians'; but they pitched in to get out the gold all the same."

But the red-skins were on the alert, and though the fire-arms of the white men made one of them equal to twenty-five or thirty red-skins, yet the wild braves came in such overwhelming numbers that the Spaniards were exterminated."

"Only two of the party ever lived to reach the coast, and tell the story of the Lost Mine and its fabulous riches."

"The avarice of the Spaniards was aroused, and party after party essayed to find the mine, but the red-skins who then inhabited this region, the wild, barbarian tribes, as the Spanish historians call them, were a much harder foe to contend with than the degenerate followers of Montezuma; these red braves, I take it, were the ancestors of the Apache, Comanche, and Navajo Indians, possibly some other tribes also."

"Anyway, they fought the Spaniards so fiercely, despite the advantage that the white men possessed in regard to weapons, that the invaders were never able to reach the locality of the Lost Mine again."

"But the story of the mine was passed from man to man, and so descended to the present day."

"I suppose a thousand attempts, more or less, have been made to find the Lost Mine, and half a dozen times within the last twenty years prospectors have believed that they were lucky enough to strike the right spot, but as the mine is in the very heart of the Indian country, and the red-skins of to-day are no less fierce than their ancestors who massacred the Spanish soldiers, no miners had ever been able to work the claim, for as soon as the red-skins discovered that their territory was invaded by the white men, they came in such numbers that the adventurers were obliged to fly for their lives."

"Yes, but the power of the Indians has been broken now," Randolph observed. "This last war settled the Apaches so that it is no longer dangerous to go up in their country."

"That is exactly the calculation that Injun Pete made," the old sport replied.

"There are only a few of the Indians left now," he remarked. "And the chances are big that two or three men would be able to go up in the Mogollon country and hunt for this Lost Mine without being in danger of losing their scalps all the time they were in the Indian country."

"Well, I am his man, if he cares to make a bargain with me!" Randolph declared.

"Oh, there isn't any doubt that he will be glad of the chance!" the old sport averred.

"Would you like to see him if he is in town?"

"I would."

"Well, I will go and inquire. If he is in the camp he is not far off."

And with this assurance Daddy High-card departed.

CHAPTER V. INJUN PETE.

AFTER the old sport had gone the stranger fell to communing with himself.

"It was a lucky chance that made me acquainted with this party," he murmured. "For now I will be put upon the right track at once, and will not have to question anyone concerning a guide, so that I will be able to keep my business to myself."

"When the men of the camp learn that I have gone into partnership with this Injun Pete they will be apt to believe me to be a tenderfoot who has been coaxed by the veteran prospector to undertake the venture, and the chances are great that no one will be apt to be shrewd enough to suspect that I planned the affair."

"I can trust the old sport to keep the matter quiet, for he is one of the kind of men who understand the importance of silence; men in his line of business are seldom given to talking."

"Altogether, so far, I think I have very good reason to be satisfied with the way in which matters are progressing."

Then the stranger remained silent for a few minutes, his brows contracted in thought.

"Another point to which I must pay attention," he said at last, speaking in a tone so low that any one seated at his elbow would have had difficulty in understanding his words.

"It will probably take a couple of days to get ready for the expedition and I will employ the time in making cautious inquiries in regard to this Timothy Higgins."

"I must learn all I can about him and his associates, for they are the men who will be apt to give me trouble if by any chance their attention should be directed to me and their suspicion aroused as to the nature of my business in this section."

"It is hardly possible though that my errand here should be suspected, for the New York parties would not be apt to think I would be bulldog enough to follow them to the wilds of the West."

"They played their game so well in New York, aided as they were by a fortunate chain of circumstances, that I was not able to beat them, but it is a long lane which has no turning, and seldom do I start into a thing of this kind without coming out the winner in the long run."

At this point Randolph's meditations were interrupted by the return of Daddy High-card.

The old sport was accompanied by a tall raw-boned man, of forty-five, or thereabouts, whose complexion was as dark as an Indian's, but his scanty crop of yellowish gray hair, clear blue eyes and straggling beard showed that no red-skin blood flowed in his veins.

He wore the frontier suit of buckskin, and it was very much the worse for wear, being patched and mended in a dozen different places, and from the rude way in which the work had been performed it was plain that the old man had acted as his own tailor.

This was the veteran prospector and mountain man, Injun Pete, reputed to be as good in his line as any one along the whole extent of the border.

The old sport introduced Injun Pete to the stranger and the mountain-man accepted Randolph's invitation to take a chair.

"Did Mr. High-card explain to you in regard to the conversation that I had with him?" Randolph asked.

"Oh, yes," the old fellow replied, speaking with a strong nasal twang. "He allowed that if I were to talk to you the right way, mebbe, you would feel like going into this leetle speculation that I have been a-thinking of for a long time."

"I am not much of a judge of that sort of thing, you know, for I am a stranger in this region—a stranger to the mining section, in fact, what you people out here call a tenderfoot," Randolph remarked.

"That don't make a bit of difference, stranger!" the mountain-man declared. "I know the hull thing from A to Izzard, and I will stump you or anybody else to find a man anywhar in the West who is better posted than I am!"

"I will jest leave it to Daddy High-card if that ain't so!" the old prospector added.

"There is no mistake about that!" the old sport observed. "When it comes to a guide, Injun Pete here can fill the bill, every time."

"Why, stranger, I have been going through this hyer country for the last thirty years, ever since I was knee high to a grasshopper!" the scout exclaimed. "I made my first trip when I was a boy of fifteen, and in those days these 'tarnel 'Paches were so durned ugly that it was as much as a man's life was worth to set foot in the 'Pache land, as they called it."

"Many and many is the mining gang that them same red-skins have run out of their territory, and in those days a red devil wasn't counted no great shakes of a buck if he couldn't show a dozen or two of white scalps!"

"I tell yer, stranger, in my time many a tight squeeze have I had to keep the red devils from lifting my hair! But they never was none of 'em smart ernuff to do the trick!" the old scout continued in a boastful way.

"I know that my hair ain't nothing to boast of," he continued, removing the battered-up old slouch hat which he wore and moving his hand in a caressing way through his scanty locks, "but it is the best I've got, and I will be gold-durned if any dirty beast of a red-skin is a-going to git it."

"But I understand that since this last outbreak of the Apaches was subdued by the troops that the power of the Indians has been completely broken and there is not much danger to be apprehended from the red-skins now," Randolph remarked.

"Wa-al, thar's a deal of truth in that," the old mountain-man admitted. "The sodgers did succeed in giving the red bucks a most onmarciful thrashing, and thar ain't any two ways about it."

"I am well-posted 'bout the thing, you know, 'cos I was in the scrimmage; I was one of the scouts, and the reason why the sodgers cleaned the red bucks right out of their boots was beco's the general in command was wise ernuff to go at the Injuns and fight 'em right in their own way, and he got a lot of us old mountain-men, who knew all about the Injun country, to help him."

"After we struck the trail of the red devils

we didn't give 'em no rest, but run 'em for all we was worth, day and night, and as we scouts knew the country 'bout as well as the red-skins did, all their doubling on their tracks and twisting about didn't help 'em a bit.

"We stuck to 'em until we run 'em to a standstill, right up in their home camp, whar they had their women and children, and then they had to fight, so we got a chance to sock it to 'em, and we everlastingly fleeced 'em, too!"

"This was a year or so ago?" Randolph inquired.

"Yes, 'bout a year."

"I suppose since that time the prospectors have been all up through the section?" continued the stranger.

"Wa-al, I reckon a good many have gone in to see what they could strike, but mighty few of them have ever got right up into the heart of the Injun country, for thar's a good many of the red-skins thar now, and, as they are a lot of ugly, treacherous devils, if they found two or three white men away up in their territory, they might be inclined to go for them if they got a good chance, and reckoned that the thing wouldn't be found out.

"Anyway, that is the idee that the most of the men in this section have, and it makes 'em kinder skeery 'bout going right up inter the heart of of the Injun country."

"Have any discoveries been made?" Randolph asked.

"No, nothing to amount to anything, but there is gold up in 'Pache land though, if a man is only lucky enuff to hit onto the right place!" the old scout declared in a tone which plainly showed how much confidence he had in the correctness of the statement.

"Now, I ain't at all skeered of the Injuns," he continued.

"And it ain't likely that the red bucks would trouble their heads 'bout a man like myself, even if they should happen to discover that I was prospecting in their country, 'cos them red devils have got a heap of sense, you know, and they would understand that they could not hope to take me by surprise—I ain't one of the kind who could be caught napping—and they wouldn't get my top-knot without the tallest kind of a fight; the chances would be big, you know, that I could send a dozen or so of their warriors to the happy hunting-grounds before I would be wiped out, and these red-skins ain't so extravagant as to be willing to give ten men for one; 'tain't according to their notions to do business in that way."

"That argument is a good one, I should say," Daddy High-card remarked.

"Judging from what I know of the Indians, it is perfectly sound," the old sport continued. "It is always their policy to attack in such overwhelming numbers that their victims can be killed without being able to offer much resistance."

"Of course, being from the East, and not knowing anything about the Indians, excepting from what I have read in regard to them, I am not qualified to pass an opinion," Randolph remarked. "But I have perfect faith in your judgment, for from what Mr. High-card has told me about you I know that you understand the situation perfectly, and if you are satisfied that the risk of danger is small I am willing to chance it if there is a reasonable probability that we will make enough to pay us for the trip."

The old scout glanced around as if to be satisfied that there wasn't any danger of his speech being overheard before he spoke.

There wasn't anybody in the saloon but the landlord, and he was seated behind the counter, at the other end of the room, engaged in reading a newspaper, and too far off to hear the conversation.

"Stranger! thar is the biggest chance for a fortune that ever a man got on the track of!" Injun Pete declared, impressively.

"That is just the kind of a speculation that I am after!" Randolph replied.

"It is the Lost Mine business," the old scout remarked in a mysterious way.

"I have heard the story, and our friend here, took pains to explain the matter to me at length," the stranger observed, nodding toward Daddy High-card.

"Some folk think that thar ain't no sich thing," the mountain-man said. "And they go so far as to declare that the yarn is made out of hull cloth, but I know better!"

"I heered the story of the Lost Mine when I was a boy, the furst year, in fact, that I came into this country, and boy-like, I reckoned that it wasn't anything but a tall yarn got up by some fellow jest for the fun of the thing to fool folks, but two or three years arter that I met a man who had found the Lost Mine.

"He was with a party, prospecting in the foot-hills of the Mogollon Mountains, and they found the mine, but before they could do much work the Injuns got arter them, and this man was the only one that escaped to tell the story.

"The people were inclined to haw, haw, at him at first, for they wasn't going to swallow no sich fool yarn, nohow! But when he hauled out chunks of gold as big as hickory nuts—jest pure chunks with no base metal into them, as

proof that his yarn was true, it jest made the folks open their eyes.

"Mighty few on 'em had ever seen such stuff afore.

"He didn't have no difficulty in gitting a gang together arter he showed the gold, and off they started for the mine.

"No white man ever saw one of them men ag'in!"

"Arter a while though, it came out through one of the Injun traders that the reds had struck the party and cut 'em off to a man."

"Such a massacre would have the result of frightening prospectors away from so dangerous a territory," Randolph remarked.

"That was jist the game the reds were playing!" Injun Pete declared.

"Wa-al, 'bout ten years ago, another party struck the mine. It was a single man this time, and after he got his specimens he lit out, for the Injuns begun to gather 'round.

"He told his yarn and got his party together, and it was with the same result; the red bucks gobbled the gang!"

"I've allers had this Lost Mine business on the brain, ever since I furst heerd the story as a youngster, but I knowd thar wasn't any use of my trying to find the lead, for it couldn't be worked as long as the reds were so ugly.

"When they were cleaned out in that last war then I knew the time had come when if the Lost Mine could be found there was a chance it could be run, and so I started in to prospect.

"I was not lucky enough to strike it, but another party did—a man named Jim Grahame; he was a close-mouthed Scotchman, who wasn't any better than he ought to be, and the game he played was to keep the thing to himself, but he fell and hurt his head and died afore he told anybody about his find.

"Arter his death chunks of gold were found in his cabin and the boys were very much astonished, but I knew where the chunks had come from, for they were the same that I had seen the prospector have thirty years ago, and I told the gang that Grahame had found the Lost Mine.

"We hunted to see if he had left any word about the thing, but didn't find anything.

"That is, nothing which gave the rest any idea, but there was a bit of a rock which told me a heap, and I was wise enough to hold my tongue.

"It was one of those fool rocks, as I call 'm, which looks as if it was chuck full of gold, when it ain't got a cent's worth to the ton!"

"Thar is only one place in the Mogollon country whar ther' is any of this fool rock. I know the exact spot, and you kin bet high that the Lost Mine ain't far off."

"It seems to me that there is a good deal of meat in this notion of yours," Randolph observed.

"Strange, I feel so sure of it that I would be willing to go ten years of my life onto it, and that is a mighty big offer for a man situated as I am, for I ain't got any too many years to spare!" the old scout declared.

"I do not doubt that you have got the thing down pretty fine, as the boys say," Randolph remarked. "And I am willing to go in with you."

"That is what I want, and if it don't turn out to be the grandest speculation that was ever hatched in Arizona, you kin take my head for a football!" the old mountain-man declared emphatically.

"How long will it take us to get ready?" the stranger asked.

"Not over a day. We want a burro to pack our provisions and tools, and we must go armed to the teeth, so that the thieving red bucks, if they happen to run across us, will see that we kin gi'n a big fight."

"All right! I am your man!" Randolph exclaimed. "I will go in with you and provide the money."

"You will be in for a good thing, and no mistake!" Injun Pete declared, in a tone of conviction.

"It was lucky that I came to Crazy Camp then, and I shouldn't have done so, if I hadn't run across a fellow from here, who, in my hearing, boasted of what a big opening there was in this town. He was named Tim Higgins."

"Yes, I know the man, a bad egg and a most unmitigated liar; he is a pard of the man who runs the gambling house next door, Harry Beaubien—Handsone Harry, as the boys usually call him, for he is a good-looking chap, and as his French name is a little too much for them, they generally shorten it to Bobby."

"What sort of a man is he?" Randolph asked in a careless way.

"Well, two of a trade never agree, you know," the old sport replied, with a laugh. "And I suppose that is the reason why I do not take much stock in him. I reckon he will bear watching!"

This brought the conversation to a close, and the three went forth to purchase supplies for the trip.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CONFEDERATES.

As Daddy High-card had said, the gambling saloon of Handsome Harry—the Frenchman's

Palace, was its grandiloquent title—was next door to the bar-room of the hotel.

It was in the same building, but as the landlord, Fat Tom, did not care to run a gambling game, and as an establishment of that kind is considered a necessary adjunct to the hotel in mining towns of the Crazy Camp order, the landlord divided the ground floor of the hotel into two apartments, and rented one of them to Harry Beaubien.

The man had a French name, and he called his place the Frenchman's Palace; he also looked like a foreigner, being swarthy in complexion, with jet-black eyes and hair. But, apart from these facts, no one would ever have taken him for a native of France, for he spoke English without the slightest trace of an accent, and could not speak French at all, as was made manifest by a wandering Frenchman who found his way into the camp, and, attracted by the sign, greeted the proprietor as a brother.

But as Handsome Harry could not understand a word, he said, the Gaul had to fall back upon the English tongue.

During the day there was no business done in Handsome Harry's place, for as the miners were all at work there wasn't any customers to keep the game running.

On the morning that John Randolph arrived in Crazy Camp two more travelers made their appearance in the town, arriving about half an hour early.

They did not come by the same road but entered the town by the southern trail.

One of the men was a short, stout, heavily-bearded fellow, a regular Westerner in dress and appearance, and was no other than the Timothy Higgins in regard to whom Randolph had inquired.

His companion was decidedly more gentlemanly in his appearance, although dressed fully as roughly as the other.

He was dark-complexioned, with peculiar, shifting gray eyes which looked to be black a short distance away.

His hair was dark, and short, stubby, brown-black beard covered his chin.

Higgins and his companion put their horses up at the hotel corral and then proceeded to the Frenchman's Palace.

Handsome Harry sat reading a newspaper in a corner of the room, with his chair tilted back against the thin board partition which divided the gambling apartment from the hotel saloon.

"Hello, Higgins, are you back?" the gambler exclaimed.

"Yes, just got in," was the reply.

"Why, it isn't possible, is it, that this is Dick Delmayne!" Handsome Harry cried, as he surveyed Higgins's companion.

"Yes, what there is left of me!" Dick Delmayne replied, for it was indeed the well-known confidence man, as accomplished and dangerous a crook as the big cities of the East had ever known.

"Well, your rough dress and your beard has made such a change in your personal appearance that if I had not expected to see a man about your size the chances are big that I would not have recognized you."

"Take a chair, boys, and make yourselves comfortable!"

They obeyed the injunction.

"I got your telegram all right, mailed from Flagstaff, and so was expecting you, but I judge from the dispatch that you had not succeeded in making a success out of the affair."

"No, it was a failure," Higgins replied.

"By the way, boys, be careful and speak low," Handsome Harry warned, lowering his voice.

"Some infernal idiot sat in the corner of the room in the hotel last night and amused himself by boring a lot of holes in the partition, and the result is that any one sitting near the wall in either room and speaking in an ordinary tone of voice can easily be heard in the other, so, as we are going to talk business, be on your guard and talk low, for there is no telling who may be on the other side of the partition."

"All right, I will be careful," Higgins said.

"Well, it is as you suspected. I did not succeed in taking the trick, although I tried my best to do it, and Delmayne has helped me all he knew how."

"Higgins telegraphed me before he got to New York, so I met him at the depot, and, as he says, we did our best to make a success out of the game, but circumstances were against us, and we could not do it," Delmayne remarked.

"But, I say, I do not exactly understand the business, so suppose you explain," the confidence man continued.

"I know of course that Higgins followed a certain man from the West, and that the party carried with him an important document which, if we could have got hold of it, would have put us in the way of getting a good bit of money, and although we were not lucky enough to get the paper, yet I know about what it amounted to."

"I can explain everything in a few words," the gambler remarked.

"There was a man in this camp named Jim Grahame. He dealt faro for me here for quite a while, but he used to put in all his spare

time in prospecting in the mountains, for he had become infected with the Lost Mine fever, and fancied, after the Apaches were whipped into submission so that it was tolerably safe for a white man to go up into their country, he would be able to discover the Lost Mine."

"Yes, I understand," Delmayne returned. "I have heard the story of the Lost Mine, but I never took much stock in it, for I thought it was only a frontier yarn."

"Oh, there isn't any doubt that it is a sure enough thing!" the gambler declared. "And what is more, this Jim Grahame was fortunate enough to find it, but right on the heels of his discovery he met with an accident, from the effects of which he died."

"Before his death he summoned a pard of his, named Tom Murphy, and after Grahame's death this Murphy started for the East. I had a suspicion that something was up, and so I played the spy after Murphy was summoned."

"All I was able to learn, though, was that Jim Grahame had a daughter in the East, whom he had not seen for years, and he deputed Murphy to carry a peculiar copper box to her which contained a paper that Grahame had written."

"I expected that the paper was of importance, of course, from the trouble that Grahame was taking about it, but had no idea that there was any money for me in the matter, until after Grahame's death, when an examination of his cabin was made. Then it was discovered that he had some peculiar chunks of virgin gold, and as I was well acquainted with the story of the Lost Mine, it immediately flashed upon me that Jim Grahame had discovered the treasure-house, and that in the document which he had sent East to his daughter, he had given instructions, by means of which the Lost Mine could be found."

"As soon as I got this idea in my mind, I started Higgins, hot foot, after Murphy, and instructed him to telegraph you to meet him at the depot in New York so he could have your aid in entrapping Murphy."

"The matter is all plain to me now," Dick Delmayne remarked.

"Well, we did go for Murphy, and succeeded in laying him out, but we did not get the copper box, although we tried our best and chased after it as eagerly as ever a hound after a fox."

"At last the copper box fell into the hands of some Frenchmen, who took out the paper, and, by a fortunate circumstance, they sent for me to advise them in regard to it, but they were careful not to allow me to know where the mine was located. Then, by an accident, the paper was destroyed, and the same accident killed both of the Frenchmen, and so the clew was lost."

"How very unfortunate!" Handsome Harry exclaimed.

"Well, things are not quite so bad as they appear," the confidence man remarked.

"After Murphy was hurt, he was carried to the hospital, where for some time he lingered before he died."

"He had got a crack on the head, which affected his brain, so he never recovered possession of his senses."

"One of my pals was an attendant in the hospital, and he repeated to me a sentence which the injured man used to mutter a dozen times a day."

"A white, dome-shaped rock; get three pines in a line with the rock, and twenty paces from the third pine, at a right angle, is the place."

"That is evidently the direction by means of which the Lost Mine can be found," the gambler remarked, thoughtfully.

"Yes, that was my idea," Dick Delmayne remarked.

"The paper undoubtedly gave full directions so that a man could go directly to the spot, but as it is evident that the mine cannot be very far from this camp, a careful search of the surrounding country ought to lead to the discovery of the place where the white, dome-shaped rock is situated."

"Oh, yes! with such a clew as that to go upon, we should be able to find the spot," the gambler declared.

"Well, that is just the way the matter stands at present," Dick Delmayne observed.

"The document that Jim Grahame sent East in the copper box is in ashes, and the only two men who read the paper have gone to their long home, so all the clew there is to the treasure-house is this sentence which I repeated to you," he continued.

"That is quite enough!" the gambler declared. "It will not be a difficult matter to find the white, dome-shaped rock with three pines standing near it."

"We must proceed in a systematic manner, you know," Handsome Harry added. "From what I know of the country around the camp, I think it is safe to conclude that it is not within ten miles of the town, and we will begin our search at that distance."

CHAPTER VII.

REACHING A CONCLUSION.

THE conversation at this point was interrupted by a noise in the adjoining apartment.

"Be quiet, boys, until we see what they are up to in the next room," the gambler said.

The three listened.

A couple of men had brought chairs to the particular corner next to the partition, sat down there, and began a conversation.

As the reader has doubtless guessed, the two were the old sport, Daddy High-card, and the stranger, John Randolph.

Although the two spoke in a moderate tone, every word of the conversation came distinctly to the ears of the three, and they listened with the greatest attention.

As the reader will comprehend, the conversation of the pair, which we detailed in a preceding chapter, was of the greatest interest to the listeners.

Then, when the veteran mountain-man was introduced, and he proceeded to explain the scheme which he had in his mind, the disgust of the three was great, and they looked at each other with scowling faces.

Not a word passed between the three until the conversation ended and the talkers passed out into the street, then a long breath came from the lips of all of them, and as they settled back in their chairs they shook their heads in a doubtful way; and it was some time before any of them spoke, for they were pondering over the unexpected news which had come to them in this odd way.

Handsome Harry was the first to break the silence.

"Well, boys, what do you think of this?" he asked.

The others shook their heads.

"Looks pretty ugly, don't it?" the gambler questioned.

"It does indeed!" Dick Delmayne replied.

"And, I say, what does the man mean by inquiring after me?" Higgins asked. "And he lies too when he says that it was my talking about this camp which induced him to come here. I never opened my head about this camp to a soul while I was away from the town."

"It is a lie, of course!" Dick Delmayne asserted. "I understood that the moment I heard him make the statement. He wanted to find out something about you and that was the way he proceeded to get it."

"He had to give some reason for bringing up your name," the confidence man continued. "And the explanation he gave was an extremely plausible one."

"Yes, but what does he want to know anything about me for, and how comes it that he is familiar with my name?" Higgins asked, unable to account for it.

"The explanation is simple enough," Dick Delmayne replied. "This man is from New York, and he is either an agent of this hound of a detective, Joe Phenix, or else Joe Phenix in person."

The other two shook their heads, and it was evident they were much troubled about the matter.

"The moment I heard the fellow speak it struck me that his voice sounded familiar," the confidence man continued.

There happened to be one of the gimlet-holes right side of me here so I could get a view of him, but if it is Joe Phenix he is mighty well disguised for I do not recognize him; but one thing is certain, that if it is not Joe Phenix it is some man whom he has sent, and there is going to be trouble."

"This Joe Phenix is one of the big New York detectives," Higgins explained. "He happened to accidentally come along just after we laid Murphy out, so he choused us out of the copper box, and from that time until the paper was burnt up in the Frenchman's house he was after us by day and night."

"Yes, he didn't allow us any rest but kept us continually on the move, and we can thank him for our failure. If he had not become mixed up in the affair the chances are big that we would have made a success out of it!" Dick Delmayne declared.

"Well, this man's appearance here at this time is certainly unfortunate," Handsome Harry remarked in a thoughtful way.

"Yes, it is going to upset our plans!" Dick Delmayne declared.

"This old scout is an extra good man, and I do not believe there is another person in the Territory who knows the country any better than he does," the gambler explained.

"And he evidently thinks that he can find the Lost Mine without any trouble," Dick Delmayne observed.

"Well, he may be mistaken in regard to that," Handsome Harry replied. "All he has to go on is the peculiar bit of rock that Jim Grahame had, but because this bit of stone was in Grahame's possession it does not follow that the mine is in the neighborhood where he got the stone."

"The old mountain-man seems satisfied that it is though," Higgins remarked.

"Yes, I know it, but that is only his idea, and he hasn't any proof to back it up," the gambler replied.

"It strikes me though that it is a mighty unlucky thing for us—his going into this business," Dick Delmayne said. "It is evident that the pair are going to start as soon as they can get ready—to-morrow, probably, and it looks to

me as if they were going to take the wind right out of our sails."

"Well, we have one advantage, you must remember," the gambler observed. "We have a clew to the whereabouts of the Lost Mine, and the moment we find the white, dome-shaped rock we are all right."

"Yes, but it may take us a deuce of a while to do it," the confidence man remarked, shaking his head in a doubtful way.

"I don't know what kind of a scout, or back-woodsman Higgins here is, but I am sure that I am no good at anything of that kind. It is completely out of my line, and I suppose it is out of yours," and Dick Delmayne looked at Handsome Harry in an inquiring way.

"Well, I don't pretend to know anything about that kind of business," the gambler said. "And, of course, it is folly for a man to undertake to do anything in a line which he is not able to handle."

"Certainly! no doubt about that!" the New Yorker exclaimed.

"I am a fair prospector," Higgins remarked. "That is, I used to be, but no great shakes at that sort of thing, you understand, and as I have not done anything of that kind for years I reckon I would not make much of a fist at it now."

"Well, this thing was sprung so suddenly upon me that I have not had time to do much thinking over the matter," the gambler remarked, in a thoughtful way.

"But now that we come to discuss the subject it is evident to me that it would only be a waste of time for three such men as we are to go in to find this white rock."

"Yes, that is so," Dick Delmayne assented.

"No doubt 'bout it," Higgins declared.

"We might amuse ourselves by doing a little riding around the country, just as though we were taking the exercise for the benefit of our health," the gambler remarked. "And we might be lucky enough to run across the white rock, although to my thinking the odds are big that we wouldn't do it."

The others agreed to this.

"The only game, as far as I can see, that we can play with any chance of winning is to get three or four good men to find the rock for us."

"Yes, but then suspicion would be immediately excited," Dick Delmayne objected.

"That is so!" Higgins declared. "There would be plenty of galoots in the camp to stick up their noses and allow that there must be something valuable in the neighborhood of the rock or else nobody would be anxious to find it."

"That is true, every word of it!" Handsome Harry exclaimed. "But, as there is more than one way to kill a cat, so, in a matter of this kind, there is more than one way to arrange it."

"It can be easily done," the gambler continued.

"Now here is a game we can play. I am not a miner, or prospector, and no one ever knew me to have anything to do with any mining business, for I have always stuck to my own line; the other fellows can get the gold out of the earth and I will get it away from them at the faro table."

"Now, then, some night before the game opens, I will be in the hotel bar-room, and will get to talking about the peculiar things that I have seen in my travels, and among others I will mention this white, dome-shaped rock, which I will say that I came across in the neighborhood of this camp somewhere."

"That will be your cue, Higgins, to speak."

"You can take me right up, say that you have seen just that same rock, and it isn't near this camp but about five miles from Flagstaff."

"Oh, yes, I see the game!" Higgins exclaimed.

"A good idea!" asserted the New Yorker.

"We can have a regular red-hot dispute over the matter, and I will wind it up by pulling out my roll and offering to bet you five hundred dollars to three that I can find the white rock in the neighborhood of this camp inside of a month."

"You can take the bet, we will put the money up in the hands of the landlord, and then I will invite the crowd to take a drink with me to bind the bet, and make a public announcement that I will give fifty dollars to the first man that locates the rock for me, as I am a little uncertain as to just where it is although I am sure it is in the neighborhood of the camp, ten or twenty miles away maybe."

"It is a capital scheme!" Dick Delmayne declared.

"Yes, sir-ee! you kin bet high on that!" Higgins asserted.

"It seems to me that it ought to work," the gambler remarked, complacently.

"The thing looks probable enough," the New Yorker said, reflectively. "Men do make just such bets, and the proceeding ought not to excite any suspicion."

"That is my idea, and any offer of fifty dollars to the man who locates the rock for me will be apt to start all the prospectors in the town," Handsome Harry observed. "It will look to them like a mighty easy way to earn fifty dollars, and then there is the chance, you know, that some man may know exactly where this

rock is located and be able to go directly to it."

"There is only one weak point about the affair," the New Yorker said, slowly.

"And what is that?" the gambler asked.

"If this stranger is Joe Phenix, the detective, or comes from Joe Phenix, I think the odds are big that he knows about this mysterious sentence that the man in the hospital was constantly muttering, and if that is so, the moment you say any thing about a white rock he will be apt to suspect the game you are trying to play."

Handsome Harry reflected over the matter for a few minutes before he spoke, and then he said:

"The chances are big that you are right, and it will not do to say anything about the white rock while he is around."

"But then if we wait until the pair are started, we give them a big advantage," Dick Delmayne suggested.

"Yes, that is true, too," the gambler remarked. "It is a mighty difficult matter to handle, no matter how you get at it."

"And here is another point, too, which has just occurred to me," he continued.

"If this man knows anything about the white rock, how was it that he did not mention it to the old mountain-man while he was talking about the expedition?"

"Maybe he thought it was his game to keep quiet at present," Dick Delmayne suggested. "His idea is to allow Injun Pete to go ahead in his own way, and then, when they get out of the town, he will tell what he knows."

"Well, there is a chance that you have the thing down fine, of course," the gambler replied. "It really looks as if this man ought to know about the white rock if he comes from the detective, as you suspect."

"I do not think there is a doubt about the matter, and it is my impression that this man is Joe Phenix in person, although he is so cunningly disguised as to defy recognition, but there isn't anything wonderful about that, you know, for this detective is a master-hand at disguises, and in New York he bears the reputation of being more expert in that line than any thief-taker that the city has ever known."

"His voice sounded familiar to me!" Higgins exclaimed with a knowing shake of the head.

"Yes, that is what first attracted my attention," Dick Delmayne asserted.

"But is it likely that the detective would come himself or send a man away out to this jumping-off place of creation?" the gambler asked, evidently a little doubtful.

"Yes, for that is just the sort of bloodhound that he is," the confidence man replied.

"He is noted for the tenacity with which he hangs on to a case, and as in this affair he got the worst of it, his pride is naturally wounded and he would be certain to put forth great efforts to square the matter."

"He failed in the East and now has come out West, thinking to meet with better success."

"It is my notion that he will find that Crazy Camp, in the wilds of Arizona, is an altogether different place from the big City of New York!" Handsome Harry exclaimed with an ugly scowl on his dark face.

"That is true enough!" Higgins cried. "And if this fellow has come out hyer with the idea of making trouble for us, we will be a blamed lot of fools if we do not make this hyer town too hot to hold him. Jest show him, you know, that though he may be the biggest kind of a man in New York he don't amount to much hyer."

"Yes, that is our game beyond a doubt!" Dick Delmayne declared.

"Most certainly it is!" the gambler asserted. "If he has come all the way from New York to Arizona for the express purpose of making trouble for us, then we ought to make it warm for him."

"It is the old story, you know," Handsome Harry continued with a cynical smile. "The best way to get rid of a dog that persists in sticking to your trail, despite all your endeavors to throw him off, is to kill the brute."

"You kin bet high it is!" Higgins exclaimed, and he clapped his hand in a significant way upon one of the revolvers belted to his side.

"I kin tell you what it is, Harry, you ain't got any idee how this hyer Joe Phenix put it to us in New York!" the Westerner continued.

"He stuck to us like our shadows, and was continually popping up when we least expected him. We would have won the game without any trouble if it had not been for him, but his interference upset the hull business."

"As I said before, Crazy Camp is not New York, and a detective, no matter how great he may be, isn't any better than a common man in this town," Handsome Harry remarked. "And if this man shows any signs that he is on the war-path against us, we will be the biggest kind of fools if we do not put him where he will not be able to trouble any one, detective or no detective!"

"That is the way to talk!" Dick Delmayne asserted.

"Well, you kin bet all you are worth that I am not afraid of the cuss hyer, although I will

own right up that he about scared me out of my boots in New York!" Higgins remarked.

"All the advantages were on his side in the big city," the gambler observed. "But in a mining-camp like this it is man to man."

"Yes, and as we are three to one we ought to be able to get away with one man," the New Yorker observed. "Although he bears the reputation of being an extra good fighter."

"We must ring in a cold deal on him," the gambler remarked with his cold and cruel smile. "In a case of this kind we must stack the cards so that he will not have any chance to win. It is my game always not to allow such a man any show."

"That is the proper course to pursue," Dick Delmayne remarked, approvingly.

"Yes, it is good, sound sense," Higgins declared. "When a man makes up his mind that he has got to have a fuss with another galoot he is the biggest kind of an idiot if he don't jump on him, tooth and nail, and in such a way that the party is bound to git laid out."

"That is the idea," the gambler remarked.

"And then, too, my plan, in all such cases, is to let out the job—look around, you know, and find some men who make a business of that sort of thing and get them to do the work."

"Well, that strikes me as being a good idea," assented Delmayne.

"Yes, each man to his trade, you see," Handsome Harry observed. "Now mine is gambling, and I am not willing to admit that there is a man living who knows any more about the business than I do. If there is, I never happened to run across him, but when it comes to war, then, although I have always managed to take my own part, yet I don't set myself up as a big chief, and I reckon that if I had to make my living in that way I would not make much of a fist at it, and so my rule has always been when I had any fighting to do to let the job out to some man who made a business of it. And that is the game I propose to work now."

"You have got the thing about right I think," Dick Delmayne remarked.

"Oh, yes, that is sound, boss sense in what Harry says!" Higgins declared.

"We have got to stop these men from leaving the camp if it is possible to do so," the gambler said. "And the only way the trick can be worked, as far as I can see, is to hire some fellows to pick a quarrel with them. I don't know much about the old mountain-man; he has a big reputation as an Indian-fighter, but when it comes to a saloon scrap, I don't believe he is anything extra."

"Well, of course I am no judge of what the man can do," Dick Delmayne said. "But if this stranger who calls himself John Randolph is the detective, Joe Phenix, then you can depend upon it that anybody who tackles him will have a hard nut to crack and no mistake, for he has been known to get away with some pretty tough customers in New York."

"I am going to put the worst man and his crowd on him that there is in all this western country!" the gambler declared.

"Who is that?" Higgins asked.

"Red Jake McAllister and his Prairie Chicken Gang," Handsome Harry answered.

"You are right! He is the toughest kind of a tough!" Higgins exclaimed. "They do say that he has killed more men than he has fingers and toes, and though we have got just as many good men in this camp as can be found in any town of its size in the mining region, yet thar' are mighty few of 'em who would keer to run up ag'in' Red Jake McAllister."

"I think I am something of a warrior myself, but I ain't hankering for any tussle with no such man as Red Jake; none of it in mine, thank you."

"We can work this game pretty neatly, I think," Handsome Harry observed, after reflecting over the affair for a few moments.

"If this John Randolph is the detective Joe Phenix, or one of the detective's men, he will be pretty certain to know both of you two, and the moment he discovers that you are in town he will be on his guard."

"Oh, yes, that is certain enough!" Dick Delmayne exclaimed. "He knows that I bear him no love, and I would do him a mischief if I could."

"Yes, and you can bet your sweet life I would jab a knife into him with the greatest pleasure!" Higgins averred. "He went for me down in York in the worst kind of way, and I should be delighted at a chance to get even with him."

"As soon as he sees either one of you, he will understand that it will be wise for him to keep his eyes open, so it is my idea that it will be best for both of you to keep shady for a while."

"Yes, that will be wise, I think," the confidence man observed.

"If we keep out of sight the cuss will go ahead, thinking no one in the camp has spotted his little game," Higgins remarked, with a chuckle.

"That is the idea," the gambler responded. "He does not know me, and it will not be possible for him to suspect that I take any interest in his movements, so that after I make the arrangement with Red Jake we will be able to

deal him a blow which will be apt to worry him."

"I have a spare room here where you two can stow yourselves away until Red Jake gets in his work."

Then Handsome Harry showed the two to the apartment, and then departed to interview the bully of Crazy Camp.

CHAPTER VIII.

RED JAKE.

AT the extreme end of the town was situated the saloon which Red Jake McAllister honored with his patronage.

It is the custom in the wild mining regions of the West to give all sorts of fanciful names to the saloons and hotels, and this particular drinking-place was called the Prairie Chicken Saloon.

And that was why Red Jake McAllister, and his chums, who made the saloon their headquarters, were known as the Prairie Chicken Gang.

The saloon was a tough place, about the toughest in the camp, being patronized only by the meanest and roughest of the miners.

When the gambler entered there wasn't any one in the place but the proprietor, Chicken Bill, as he was called, who was seated in an arm-chair, tilted back against the wall, half-asleep.

He opened his eyes and nodded in a lazy way to Handsome Harry.

"Is Red Jake around?" the gambler asked.

"Yes, taking a snooze in the back room. Do you want to see him?"

"Yes, I have a little business on hand which I want Red Jake to take hold of for me."

"Is thar any money in it?"

"A little, I reckon."

"Red Jake is just the boy to grab at it, then, for his cash is at low-water mark jest now," the saloon-keeper observed.

"I don't know how business is with you, but it is awful slow up this way, and has been for a week or so; so Red Jake was allowing last night that if he did not do better this week than he did last, he would have to go and hunt a job, and if thar is anything that Jake hates, it is to handle a pick and shovel in a mine."

"Well, I don't blame him for not wanting to make his money in that way," the gambler replied. "I reckon that if I had to depend upon a shovel and a pick for my grub, that I would not get much to eat."

"I'm in that same boat, too!" Chicken Bill declared. "But if you want to see Jake, just walk right in."

Handsome Harry obeyed the injunction.

The "back room" was an apartment in the rear of the saloon which at night was used for the accommodation of poker parties.

In this saloon, as in all others in the town, there wasn't any business done during the day, so Red Jake had taken advantage of this fact to drag a buffalo into a corner and curl himself up upon it for a nap.

The entrance of Handsome Harry disturbed his slumbers, and he rose to a sitting posture, rubbing his eyes.

Red Jake McAllister was a big, overgrown fellow, standing about six feet high and muscularly built, but he was a clumsy, loose-jointed, awkward clown, and a judge of athletics would never have picked him out for a man likely to ever make a mark as a fighter.

Notwithstanding this fact the man had a great reputation as a warrior, and was looked upon generally as being the biggest kind of a chief.

He was an ugly-looking fellow, low-browed and with a jaw like a bull-dog, his head covered with a shock of coarse, red hair and a bristle-like beard of the same hue concealed all the lower part of his face.

Take him for all in all he was about as ugly a looking customer as a man would be likely to meet in a month's travel among the wildest mining-camps of the great West.

He was armed to the teeth, as the saying is, a brace of revolvers being belted to his waist, and a knife, with a blade nearly a foot long, kept the revolvers company.

"Hello, Handsome is that you?" the big fellow growled in his deep, base voice.

Red Jake had a high respect for the elegant gambler.

He himself depended upon gambling for a living, but he wasn't a "marker" in that line, as the boys say, to Handsome Harry.

He was a clumsy fellow compared to the first-class sport, and although he never hesitated to cheat in the most bare-faced manner, yet he was so awkward in handling cards that he did not dare to try any tricks unless his adversary was so overcome by liquor as to be incapable of using his eyes.

Owing to this fact, and also to the one that Red Jake was only a fair player, not being gifted with any particular skill at cards, it was a hard matter for him to make much by gambling, unless he was lucky enough to meet with plenty of drunken miners who had money and were willing to risk it at cards.

"Yes, I am here; how is the world using you?" the gambler asked, helping himself to a chair.

"Durned poorly!" Red Jake responded.

"Chicken Bill said that things were not panning out very well."

"Wa-al, they ain't for a sure enuff fact," the other responded with a weighty shake of the head.

"The fact is I have got to strike something new or I won't be able to 'git my grub, to say nothing of my lick, and a man like I am can't git along without his regular allowance of bug-juice, you know."

"No, I should say that it was pretty hardlines when you have let up on your p'ison."

"I was jest a-thinking 'bout you when I went to sleep," the big fellow observed.

"Is that so?"

"You bet! I was jest a-reckoning if I couldn't git a place as bouncer in your shebang," Red Jake remarked. "I don't know whether you have much trouble with the galoots w'ot come inter your place or not."

"Chicken Bill has a heap hyer sometimes, and I have to do considerable bouncing, but Bill don't do a very big trade, you know, and so he can't afford to pay me anything to speak of. I am free to bunk in hyer when I like and when I am run clean down to the bed-rock he looks out that I don't suffer for my whisky, but that is the best he can do."

"Well, if I had any use for a bouncer you would be jest the man, Jake that I would go for, but the boys understand how I run my place and it is very seldom indeed that I have any trouble," the gambler replied.

"My dealer always has a pair of shooting irons on a shelf under the table, so he can put his hands on them in a twinkling of an eye, you know, and I am always around, and, though I say it myself, a quicker man on the draw cannot be scared up in these diggings."

"The boys understand these facts and so I seldom have any trouble; and then too the class of customers who come into my place are extra good, for everybody that knows anything about my shanty comprehends that I am going to have order there or kill somebody, so there is never any difficulty unless some drunken galoots get in, or some stranger who didn't know the rules of the house."

"Yes, you run your shebang right up to the handle, and thar's no two ways 'bout it," the bully remarked.

"Everybody says that your game is squar' too, and when a man puts up his ducats in your place he gits a squar' deal for 'em, every time."

"That is the sort of man that I am, Jake!" Handsome Harry declared. "I aim to run my place in first-class Eastern style, and the men in the camp who are posted, allow that I do it, too."

"You bet!" cried the big fellow.

"But I didn't come up here to chin with you just for the fun of it, you know. I am old business from the word go!"

"Any money in it?" asked Red Jake, eagerly.

"I reckon there is."

"I'm yer man, then, every time!"

"Do you know Injun Pete?"

"Oh, yes, the long, slab-sided cuss! and I ain't got no opinion of him, either!" the bully announced.

"He is in the camp again."

"Yes, I know it, I saw him last night, and when you ax me if I know him, I kin say, I bet yer! I know him to the tune of fifty dollars."

"How was it?"

"Wa-al, I happened to run across the old cuss once when I was so flush with money that I didn't know what to do with it, and I grub-staked him to the tune of fifty dollars."

"And the thing didn't pan out well, eh?"

"Pan out!" cried Red Jake, in a tone of deep disgust. "It didn't pan out for a cent!"

"He did not succeed in striking anything?"

"Yes, he did, a pretty fair lead, judging from the ore he brought back, but the claim was up in the 'Pache land, and I was no sardine to let the red bucks git a chance at my top-knot for all the gold-mines that thar are on top of this hyer earth!"

"I don't blame you for not wanting to risk it."

"And do you know, Handsome, I've allers had an idee that the old galoot put up a job on me!" the big fellow declared, shaking his head in a solemn way.

"How so?"

"Wa-al, I reckon that somebody w'ot had a grudge ag'in' me set on the old cuss to rope me into the grub-stake business, and then have him tell the yarn 'bout the mine he had diskivered, so as git me up in the mountains whar the 'Paches would have a chance to lift my ha'r."

"It might be possible, for it is my opinion that Injun Pete is a deep, old scoundrel!" the gambler asserted.

"Oho! you have got it in for him then?" Red Jake exclaimed.

"Yes, it is not necessary for me to go into particulars, you know," Handsome Harry observed. "All that I care to say is that I think the fellow is a miserable skunk and it would do me good to hear that he had been laid out!"

"Would it do you fifty dollars good to hear

that he had been well-hammered?" the bully asked with a grin.

"Yes, I would go that sum willingly, and there is a stranger, who is traveling around with him, a tall, dark fellow, who looks like a half-breed, and calls himself John Randolph, I would go another fifty to have him well-hammered too."

"A hundred for the pair?"

"Yes."

"I don't s'pose you would cry much if either one of them was put in a condition for planting?" the bully said with a grin, as if he was suggesting a particularly pleasant operation.

"No, I would not!" Handsome Harry replied promptly. "In fact I think I would go another hundred."

"You don't mean it?" Red Jake exclaimed, surprised by the liberal offer.

"Yes, I do, and I am a man, you know, who can be depended upon to stick to his word."

"Oh, I know that! You are as squar' as they make 'em, every time!" the bully responded.

"If you see your way clear it looks to me as if there was a chance for you to pick up a couple of hundred ducats with very little trouble."

"You bet! and I am just the kind of boy to grab sich a chance!" Red Jake declared promptly.

"I understand that the two are going to leave the camp to-morrow, so you will not have any time to lose," the gambler remarked.

"This stranger has gone in with Injun Pete on the grub-stake business, I heard."

"I will attend to both on 'em to-night!" Red Jake declared.

"You will need help."

"One man only, and I will take my pard, Jack Smithers. Jack is as good a man, you know, as you kin scare up in the town."

Handsome Harry assented.

Smithers was another ruffian of about the same grade as Red Jake, a burly, black-bearded fellow who was of such a quarrelsome nature that he was always in trouble.

"Of course, I don't want it known that I had anything to do with this matter," the gambler observed as he rose to depart.

"Sart'inly not! whose business is it anyway?"

"That's true! Keep a close mouth; so-long!"

and Handsome Harry took his departure.

"Oh, this is a reg'lar pic-nic!" cried Red Jake.

CHAPTER IX.

A DISTURBANCE.

NIGHT had again cast its sable mantle over the town of Crazy Camp.

The miners had come in from the outlying gulches, and all the places of popular resort in the camp were well filled with people.

The hands of the clock pointed to the hour of nine when Red Jake and Jack Smithers came swaggering into the hotel.

There were twenty-five or thirty people in the saloon; a few patronizing the bar, but the great majority gathered in little groups here and there, discussing the news of the day.

In a mining-camp the principal saloon is usually a sort of miners' exchange where the inhabitants meet for the purpose of finding out what is going on.

In a corner of the room stood the old scout and the stranger, John Randolph, in the center of a group of people, who were questioning Injun Pete concerning the chances of finding gold up in the Apache-land.

Although the old mountain-man had not been particularly lucky as a prospector, yet the miners at large had a great deal of faith in his knowledge of the Indians, and believed he knew the wilderness where the red-skins roamed as well as any man living.

The old scout gave his opinions in cautious words.

He believed there was plenty of gold up in the Apache-land, but it was a question whether it was in such a condition that the individual miner could make anything out of it.

Of course, if the gold was not free, but locked up in ore so as to require machinery to get it out, it would necessitate the employment of capital before any money could be made.

And in regard to the Indians, although it was true that they had been so soundly whipped by the Government troops as to be compelled to sue for peace, and some of the bands, almost exterminated—the ugly warlike division of the tribe had especially suffered—yet there were enough red-skins still left in the Apache-land to cause considerable trouble to any small parties of white men who might venture into the Territory; and the old fellow gave it as his decided opinion that notwithstanding the Apaches had been so soundly thrashed, and had vowed that they would not go upon the war-path again, the treacherous red-skins would not hesitate a moment in attacking any small party of whites whom they might discover to be in the Apache-land, if they thought there was not much chance of their outrage becoming known.

The old mountain-man was a firm believer in the assertion so common on the frontier that the only good Indian is a dead one.

Red Jake and his pard swaggered into the room just as Injun Pete made the declaration

that it was his opinion that people would be wise in not being in a hurry to go up into the Apache-land until it was ascertained beyond a doubt that the Apaches could be trusted to let the whites alone.

"It strikes me that thar is a heap of good, sound, solid sense in what Injun Pete has been giving us," a veteran, gray-bearded miner observed.

This speech being made loud enough to reach the ears of Red Jake afforded that worthy a chance to speak.

"Say! don't take any stock in what that old bragging galoot says or else you will git badly left!" the ruffian exclaimed.

All within the saloon were astonished, and the miners exchanged glances of amazement.

Both the tone and the words produced the impression that Red Jake was anxious to pick a quarrel, and the men who were between the Injun Pete group and the bullies, who stood half-way between the door and the bar, began to nervously edge back toward the walls, so as to leave a clear space in the center of the room.

These men knew how disrespectful flying bullets are of human forms, and they were anxious to get back out of the way so that they might not be in danger of stopping bits of lead which were not intended for them.

The face of the old scout flushed a little, and a peculiar steely glitter came into his clear, gray eyes.

"Ain't you throwing your talk 'round a leetle loosely?" he asked, more in amazement than anger visible in his tones.

Randolph too had his eyes on the pair, but his face might as well been formed of marble as far as any clew to his feeling could be gained from it.

"I reckon I know w'ot I am saying!" Red Jake cried, in an insolent way.

"I know you of old, you bet, and you can't fool me for a cent's worth!" he continued, and he swaggered up to within a couple of yards of the old scout as he spoke, his companion, the black-bearded Jack Smithers, keeping close by his side.

"I went in fifty dollars on you—fifty good solid chucks!" and Red Jake's voice was loud and arrogant.

"And what did I get for my money, hey?"

"You took your chances as many a better man than you has done, and you have no call to complain," the old mountaineer retorted, quietly, but with considerable scorn perceptible in his tone.

"Don't you talk to me 'bout any better men!" Red Jake howled, indignantly. "I want you, and everybody else, to understand that a better man than I am don't tread on top of this hyer footstool! I mean it, bar none! And that is the kind of a plum bird on a lily root that I am!"

"Now, see hyer, Injun Pete, I'm a right down peaceable man, I am, but I don't allow nobody to walk over me!" the bully continued, shaking his finger in a warning way at the old scout.

"You jest skinned me out of fifty solid chucks, and thar's no two ways 'bout it, and when I think over that leetle operation my blood begins to b'ile! And when my blood begins to b'ile, I want you to know that I am a wolf, and I howl for gore! Do you hear me? It is my horn that is a-blowing!"

"You went into the thing with your eyes open, and if you found the money I took the risk, and when I struck a lead up in the hills you did not have sand enuff to go up with me and see with your own eyes what it was like!"

"What is that?" yelled Red Jake at the top of his voice, and he began to brandish his huge fists in the air.

"Do you mean to say I ain't got any sand? Are you jist a-dying for to get the wolf up on his hind legs, so he will come and chaw you?"

"Oh, go 'long with you!" cried Injun Pete, indignantly. "You can't scare me with your tom-focery! I have seen big men afore I ever ran across you, and I don't give a cent for wolves, no matter whether they are on four legs or two, and I want you to understand that you can't bulldoze me! Go monkey around somebody else! I'm a mountain lion, I am, when I git my wool up, and I reckon I'm equal to chawing a hull pack of wolves, and don't you forget it!"

The old scout was "mad all the way through," as the saying is, and the bystanders were very much astonished at the pluck he displayed in standing up to the leading bully of the town, a man of whom the citizens generally stood in awe.

No one doubted the courage of the old mountain-man; he was too well-known all along the whole line of the frontier for that; but he had always been such a quiet fellow when in the town, no one had ever known him to get into a brawl or to be concerned in any difficulty, and so the miners when they perceived that trouble was brewing were inclined to be sorry that Red Jake had chosen to "pick a fuss" with the old scout, never stopping to consider that it was more than probable that the man who for twenty years had braved the power of the wild

red chiefs amid their mountain retreats for the better part of the time, would be able to hold his own with a common bar-room brawler.

"Durn yer old hide!" Red Jake yelled, amazed and disgusted at being thus boldly defied. "For two pins I would yank you clean out of your skin!"

And he drew back his ponderous right fist in a threatening way to give due effect to his words; but no sooner was the sentence ended and the threatening gesture made, than the nervous right arm of the old mountain-man shot out with wonderful rapidity, and the iron-like fist, catching the bully squarely between the eyes, sent him over on his back with a force which astounded everybody in the room.

And almost at the same moment, hardly a second behind, John Randolph dealt Jack Smithers a "right-hander" on the jaw, which, to the astonishment of the ruffian, seemed to loosen every tooth he had in his head.

He, too, went over backward, brought to the floor by the force of the blow, falling like a log.

Hardly a man in the room was there but had seen some pretty fights, but it was the universal opinion that two better blows had never been struck since the "winning of the west" first began.

Howls of rage came from the throats of two stricken men, and as they began to rise they fumbled for their revolvers.

The old mountain-man and the stranger were on the look-out for just such a movement as this, and no sooner did the pair of bullies clasp their hands to their revolvers than their opponents caught up the heavy arm-chairs, apparently disdaining to use the weapons upon their foes, and with a few blows stretched the two senseless upon the floor; this victory being won in far less time than we have taken to relate the particulars.

The miners looked on in perfect amazement. The idea that the two big chiefs of the town could be thus easily defeated was wonderful.

CHAPTER X.

THE STRANGER'S SURMISE.

"If these hyer two galoots have got any friends in this yere crowd they had better git some shutters and tote them off so a doctor kin attend to them, for I reckon they won't be of much use to themselves, or anybody else, until they git patched up a bit," Injun Pete declared.

"Well, I s'pose I will have to take charge of 'em!" a little, fat, bald-headed, fussy-looking man exclaimed, stepping forward.

This was Doc Meriwether, the Express-agent, and also the local doctor.

Rumor declared that the doctor was far more competent to treat horses and cows than humans, but as he was the only man in the camp who made the slightest pretensions to medical knowledge, the inhabitants were forced to consult him when they were ill, or do without medical attendance.

The two men were removed, having been put completely "hors de combat," as the doctor remarked, anxious to air his knowledge.

Merriwether superintended the proceeding.

As we stated, the miners were amazed by the easy victory that the pair had won, but the most astonished man of all was the gambler, Handsome Harry, who, standing in the doorway which led from the saloon into the gambling den, had watched the contest.

"These men are going to be a devilish sight more dangerous than I thought," the gambler muttered, as he withdrew into his saloon after the vanquished men were removed.

The miners, with that instinct so common to mankind which leads to hero-worship, wanted to make much of the conquerors, for as one old gray-bearded miner observed:

"Gents, I want you to understand that you have done this town a service in showing these two blustering galoots that they ain't near sich big men as they thought they was!"

A half a dozen voices immediately chimed in: "That's so!"

"True as preachin'!"

"Both on 'em ought to have had some sense knocked into their thick heads a long time ago!" "You bet!"

"Wa-al, boys, I ain't the kind of man to go prancing 'round any town a-telling what a heap of a fighter I am," the old mountain-man observed, as soon as the crowd ceased their exclamations.

"I ain't one of the men to waste much wind in blowing my own horn, but when it comes to business—real, downright solid business, I reckon I ain't often to be found among the missing."

The members of the crowd took pains to assure the veteran that this was exactly the opinion they had formed of him.

Then, in response to an extremely urgent invitation, the old mountain-man and John Randolph took a drink with the crowd, and afterward retreated to their apartment up-stairs, so as to get away from their enthusiastic friends, who were disposed to insist upon their drinking a large quantity of liquor in order to celebrate their victory.

As the room which had been assigned to Randolph was plenty big enough for two he had suggested to Injun Pete that it would be a good idea if he came to the hotel and shared the room.

The old mountain-man had been "bunking in" as he expressed it with a miner friend who had a small cabin on the outskirts of the town, and as the quarters were rather narrow ones Injun Pete gladly accepted the offer.

After reaching the room Randolph lighted the candle and took a seat upon the bed while Injun Pete perched himself upon the stool—the bed and stool were all the furniture there was in the apartment—drawing his knees up to his chin in a peculiar way.

"Wa-al, pardner, I have seen a good many scimmages in my time—have been in a few personally, and they were right lively ones too, but this leetle affair to-night lays 'em all out."

"Yes, it was a hummer while it lasted," the other replied.

"You bet it was!" the old mountain-man declared. "It jest knocks the socks off of anything in the line that I ever saw, or heered tell on."

"It was a lively little skirmish, but it was like the handle of a pump, all on one side."

"Right you are fer ducats! And I say, pard, after this leetle affair to-night this sweet-scented pair will never be able to go blowing round the town telling what big chiefs they are, for some feller will be sure to throw this licking up in their teeth and 'call them down.'"

"Very likely."

"And thar is another p'int 'bout this affair which makes me glad that it happened."

"What is it?"

"You are a stranger in these parts, and a tenderfoot, so you say'd—"

"Yes, that is the truth."

"And you kinder spoke as though you were a leetle doubtful as to whether you could hold your end up in this expedition or not."

"Well, you know, I have no experience in that line," the other explained.

"That is what I supposed, but it don't matter; when it comes to the fighting, you are all there, and that is the main point, you know."

"I do not care to boast of what I can do in that line, but I will say that I have always managed to hold my own, and in the face of pretty desperate odds too," Randolph remarked.

"I have led a life of adventure, and my course has not been one of plain sailing by a long shot," he continued. "Still, without boasting, I can say that, no matter what the odds were, in nine cases out of ten I managed to come out the victor."

"I don't doubt that in the least!" the old mountain-man exclaimed.

"And I am a good deal like you too. I am one of the kind of men who never gits into a fuss if he kin keep out, but when I do wade in it's my notion to make myself a holy terror, and I ain't been knocking 'round the back-door of civilization all these years without learning how to use my fists either!"

"You certainly understand how to strike a good blow."

"Yes, but the lick I fetched my man ain't a circumstance to the one you gave yourn."

"Jerusalem! I don't think I ever saw a man git such a lick!" the old mountain-man exclaimed, full of enthusiasm.

"Why the cuss turned up the whites of his eyes as though he had been sent for and couldn't come, and, I sw'ar I believe I heered every tooth in his head rattle, and when he tried to git up and felt for his revolver he acted for all the world like a drunken man."

"In course, you didn't give him any chance to show what he could do, for you laid him out with a chair, same as I did, but between me and you, and the bed-post, I don't believe the feller could have got on his feet and made any kind of a fight to save his gizzard. You had him clean whipped, and no mistake."

"I hit him on the point of the jaw, or that is, I tried to as nearly as I could," the other explained.

"It is a trick that I learned from the professional pugilists," he continued. "The stroke is a favorite 'knock-out' blow with a great many of them who make boxing their business, and it is the general belief among these fighters that a powerful blow on the jaw will demoralize a man more, and in quicker time than when the stroke falls on any part of the body."

"Wa-al, I reckon, them fellers are 'bout right, judging from the way you sickened that ornery cuss, Jack Smithers," the old mountain-man remarked.

"By the way, it was a strange thing that this big bully should make such a decided set at you," Randolph said, thoughtfully.

"Yas, it was kinder queer."

"Did you ever have any trouble with him before?"

"Nary time."

"And is it true that he grub-staked you once, and the thing was unsuccessful?"

"Yas, but, lordy, that was over ten years ago!" the old mountain-man replied.

"Is it possible?"

"Sart'in! and it was all his own doings, too."

I ran across him up at Prescott, and he jest pestered me until I went inter the thing with him. I kinder held back, you know, for I understood what kind of a man he was; he was jest the same then as he is now, a bully and a gambler, who seldom earned an honest dollar."

"Not a desirable man to do business with," Randolph remarked.

"No, not by a jugful! But he was so durned anxious to go into the thing that finally I agreed to the arrangement."

"Then, too, at the time I was strapped, and didn't exactly know where to turn for a dollar."

"Under such circumstances you could not afford to be particular."

"That is a fact, and I thought I had a good chance to strike something, too, for I was going up in the Mogollon Mountain country in a district whar thar hadn't been much prospecting on account of the red-skins."

"You see, it was just at the close of a big Injun war, and as the reds had been pretty badly flaxed—their big chief, Serape Colorado, had been captured and killed while a prisoner by a soldier, whom he sassed, striking a bayonet inter him—I reckoned there might be a chance for business."

"Yes, I see."

"Things didn't turn out exactly as I thought they would, for the reds, although they had been whipped, were uglier than a lot of p'ison sarpiants stirred up with a stick, and I soon found I could not go up into Apache-land as I calculated upon doing."

"In spite of that I struck a fair kind of a lead, but when I came back and told this big-mouthed son-of-a-gun whar it was, he acted as though he thought I wanted to get him up inter the mountains so that the Injuns would have a chance to lift his top-knot."

"Well, that was a ridiculous idea!"

"Wasn't it? And then, as he didn't want any of the thing in his'n—that's what he said—and I had no money to spend into it, I sold the claim for fifty dollars, and offered him half, but he wouldn't have it."

"He was playing in big luck jest then, you see, being a partner in one of the biggest gambling establishments in the town of Prescott, and he thought he was putting on a sight of frills when he told me, right afore a crowd, that he didn't keer for no twenty-five dollars, and that if I would treat the house, he would call it squar."

"That was certainly a liberal offer."

"Yes, and I did it too, and I reckoned that settled the thing," the old mountain-man remarked.

"It ought to have done so."

"Why, I have seen the man fifty times since then, and he never said anything 'bout the matter, and what on earth started him on that track to-night is a mystery."

"From the way he acted I should say that he came into the saloon for the express purpose of having trouble with you," Randolph observed.

"I will be blamed if it don't look like it."

"Yes, it certainly does, for he seized upon the first opportunity to pick a quarrel—in fact went out of his way."

"Sart'in! for I never said a word to him until he came at me like a mad bull, and although I am a peaceable man, and not as young as I once was, still I am no dog to be kicked, and when anybody tries to walk over me you had better believe I am going to fight all I know how."

"That is natural under the circumstances. There is no reason that you know of apart from this old affair, why this bully should have cause to bear you ill will?" Randolph asked in a thoughtful way.

"No, I never had anything to do with him but that once," Injun Pete replied. "And that is what bothers me; why should he dig up that old matter, and go for me, red-hot, all of a sudden?"

"I think I can explain that mystery," the other declared with a quiet smile.

"Wa-al, if you kin it is a durned sight more than I kin do."

"You were attacked on my account."

The old mountain-man looked surprised.

"Durned if I understand that!"

"A few words will explain. I came to this camp on a certain bit of business—there are parties in the East who understand all about that business."

"I will say to you, frankly, that my name is not John Randolph, that is only assumed, and I have also changed my personal appearance so as not to be recognized."

"I thought I had stolen a march on these men who are after the same game as myself, which is this Lost Mine of which you spoke. My sole object in coming to Crazy Camp was to find that mine. I have a clew to its whereabouts, so also have these other parties, and it is my belief that they are in possession of directions so they can go directly to the mine."

"By gosh! this hyer statement of yourn kinder astonishes me!" the old scout declared.

"These Eastern men, who are really running a race with me to see who will get to the mine first, are strangers in this country, just as I am, and although they may have the directions so

plain that they can know exactly where the mine is located, yet they must procure a guide before they can go to it."

"Yas, I see."

"I thought I had got the start of the fellows, and was first on the ground, but now I have come to the conclusion that I have made a mistake."

"My men are already here, and although I thought my disguise was an extremely good one, yet I am forced to the conclusion that I have been recognized."

"I went around the town with you, confident in my disguise, and, in fact, feeling sure that there wasn't anybody in the camp who would know me, or suspect what my business was here, even if I had not taken the trouble to disguise myself."

"It 'pears to me that that was reasonable enuff."

"I am satisfied that I made a mistake. I allowed the fact that I had gone into a partnership with you to become public, and if I had been wise I would have kept the matter quiet; but there is an old and trite saying which declares that a man is never too old to learn."

"That is so, true as Gospel! I have been thar and I know!"

"And I do not care how careful, or expert, a man may be, he cannot hope to keep from making mistakes."

"That is true ag'in!"

"These men are in the town; they have recognized me and understand why I come here, and my partnership with you has given them the alarm, for they realized there is danger, that, aided by you, I will succeed in reaching the Lost Mine before they can do so."

"Their game is lost unless they can succeed in preventing us from leaving the town, and in order to accomplish that object this big ruffian was hired to pick a quarrel with you; there were two of them, remember, and the calculation was that the pair would be able to lay us up, for the plotters rightly thought that if you were attacked I would come to your assistance."

"Blame me! if don't think that you have got this thing figured out pretty nearly right!" the old mountain-man exclaimed, after reflecting over the matter for a moment.

"That is my opinion. This attack was no sudden affair, sprung on the impulse of the moment, but was carefully planned, and that it did not succeed was not the fault of either the men who planned it or the hired bullies who attempted to carry out the scheme."

"No, that is so," the old mountain-man observed with a chuckle. "The fact is the galoots wasn't equal to the job they tackled; they bit off a heap sight more than they could chew!"

"That is about the idea," Randolph remarked.

"Now, my suspicions that everything was not going on as well as I would wish were excited this evening, for after we had our supper, and we sat in the corner over there, I happened to look in the glass behind the bar and there caught sight of a man watching us."

"You don't say so?"

"Yes, he stood in the entrance which leads into the gambling saloon next door, and from the peculiar way in which he was watching us I was satisfied that he was no friend."

"It was just a chance, you know, that I happened to catch sight of him in the glass, and as my back was to him he had no suspicion that I could see what he was doing."

"Sart'in! now that is what I call a streak of luck."

"Yes, for it put me on my guard at once, as I immediately got the idea that danger threatened, so when the ruffian showed that he intended to pick a quarrel with you, I was not at all taken by surprise."

"Yas, I see. But, I say, did you find out who the galoot was that was a-watching on you?"

"Yes, after he got out of the way, I improved a chance to speak to the landlord, and easily discovered."

"The man was the gambler who runs the game next door, Handsome Harry."

"Oh, yes, the Frenchman; but, I say, what on earth has he got to do with the affair? What is it to him?"

"Now you are too much for me; you are putting a question which I cannot answer, and though I have always considered myself to be an excellent guesser, yet in this instance I am utterly at fault, for my imagination cannot supply a reason why he should take any interest in the matter."

"But I am certain that he does, for he stood in the doorway during the fight, and I took occasion to cast a swift glance at him after it ended, and there was a scowl of baffled rage in his dark face."

"Of course, I was careful not to let him see that I noticed him at all."

"No, you don't want the galoot to understand that you are up to his little game."

"The only possible explanation of why he should take any interest in the matter, is that he is a friend of the New Yorker, who is mixed up in the affair, and is working the game for him."

"Wa-al, we have taken the first trick, any-

how!" the old scout exclaimed, with one of his dry chuckles.

"We will be all ready to depart the day after to-morrow?"

"Yas, we will be all fixed by then."

"That gives them another day, then, to hatch up some trick to stop us, and we must be on our guard. I should give out, though, that we do not intend to leave for a week, which will be apt to make them a little slow in working."

"That is our game, but the moment we git ready, we'll slip away!"

And then the two fell to planning the details of the expedition, and so we leave them.

CHAPTER XI.

A DISAPPOINTMENT.

THE dark-faced gambler was hot with rage as he turned from the doorway, after witnessing the utter defeat of the two ruffians.

"Red Jake is an idiot!" he muttered, between his clinched teeth. "If he had not taken up so much time with talking, but had proceeded to the attack immediately, the thing might have ended differently, although there isn't any doubt that the pair are extra good men, but Jake was foolish to give them any chance."

"His game ought to have been to have picked a quarrel with the old scout, and gone for him with his knife or pistol."

He made his way while indulging in these meditations to the rear apartment, where Dick Delmayne and Higgins had taken refuge.

The pair were playing cards, to pass the time away, when the gambler entered, and by the cloud upon his brow they immediately conjectured that something was wrong.

"Well, boys, Red Jake and his pard have made their move—"

"And it did not work, eh?" Dick Delmayne exclaimed, anticipating what the gambler was about to say.

"Oh, yes, it worked splendidly—for the men whom the pair were going to lay out."

"The thing failed?"

"You bet it did!" Handsome Harry exclaimed, in a disgusted way. "It took just about a minute, by the watch, for the old mountain-man and this John Randolph to whip Red Jake and his pard to a standstill, and now the miners are carrying them away on shutters."

An exclamation of amazement came from the lips of the two at this intelligence.

Handsome Harry then related the particulars of the fight.

"It was badly planned it seems to me," Dick Delmayne declared.

"Red Jake ought to have fixed the thing so that they wouldn't have had any show," Higgins observed. "He might have known that if he gave them a chance the odds were big they would make a good fight, for neither one of the men is a slouch."

"He did the best he knew how, I suppose," the gambler replied. "It is very easy now that the thing is over for us to find fault and say that he didn't do so and so. Maybe, if we had been in his place we would not have planned the scheme any better."

"Well, to my mind one thing is certain," Dick Delmayne affirmed. "And that is that the man was entirely too confident. He thought he was such a terrible fighter that the others did not stand any chance with him, and that is just where he made the biggest kind of a mistake."

"He will know better next time," Handsome Harry remarked, grimly. "He will never make the mistake of underrating either one of the two again, and you can depend upon it that the next time he takes the war-path against them, he will see that things are fixed so they will not have much chance for their lives."

"He will be wise to work the game in that way and will make a great mistake if he does not," the New Yorker declared.

"As soon as my game closes so I can get away I will go and see Jake," the gambler announced.

"And from what I know of the man I think it is safe to say that this hyer town of Crazy Camp will not be big enough to hold him and these two strangers as soon as he gets on his legs again."

And with this assurance the gambler returned to his saloon.

It was a little after twelve before the game ended and Handsome Harry was at liberty to seek the defeated ruffians.

He found the pair in the back room of the Prairie Chicken Saloon, reclining on rude couches, and so bandaged up that they strongly resembled Egyptian mummies.

"Durn me for a sucker if Jake and Jack didn't git the worst kind of a hiding!" Chicken Bill avouched when the gambler inquired in regard to the pair.

Then Red Jake lifted up his head and recognized the gambler.

"Say, this is the worst deal I ever got in my life!" the defeated ruffian exclaimed.

"You did get a little the worst of it," Handsome Harry admitted.

"The worst of it!" Red Jake cried, in a tone of amazement.

"Yes, that is what I said."

"You kin bet on it!" the ruffian exclaimed, emphatically.

"Say, pard, we wasn't in the game at all, neither me nor Jack!"

"Well, that was because they got in the first blows, and after they secured an advantage did not give you any show," Handsome Harry explained.

"Show! yes, we had a show to be struck by lightning, but that was 'bout all!" Red Jake declared in a disgusted way.

"You will know better next time," the gambler said, in a consoling manner.

"Yes, you kin bet a heap of ducats that I will!" Red Jake affirmed, in a tone which plainly showed that he meant what he said.

"I was taken completely by surprise," the gambler observed, in a thoughtful way.

"I had no idea that Injun Pete had so much fight in him. I knew that folks said he was a good scout and Indian-fighter, but I never heard of his being mixed up in a bar room skirmish before."

"Pard, he is at the very top of the heap, and don't you forget it!" Red Jake announced in a solemn way.

"It was a mistake that you did not use your knife or a gun," Handsome Harry declared.

"Do you think so?" and Red Jake gave a groan as he put the question.

"Yes, I do."

"Wa-al, I kin jest tell you, Handsome Harry, that it was a mercy that we didn't," the wounded ruffian replied. "Cos if we had pulled guns or knives, and them galoots had done the same, neither Jack nor myself would be lying hyer now."

"You think not?" the gambler asked, surprised by the declaration.

"No, siree, and you kin bet high on it too; the boys would be planting us up on the hillside 'bout this time," the bully answered in a doleful way.

"Oh, come now, not as bad as that, you know!" the gambler asserted.

"Yes, sir, that is the honest truth, and no mistake!" Red Jake declared.

"Them fellers are quick—as quick as chain lightning," he continued. "And if we had got our guns out and they had got their guns out, it is dollars to doughnuts that they would have sent both of us to the happy hunting-grounds so quick that we wouldn't have even had time to attend to the checking of our baggage!"

"Oh, I think you are exaggerating things now a little!" Handsome Harry declared. "Because the pair were lucky enough to get the best of this little skirmish is no sign that they are anything extra as warriors."

"Handsome, did you see the fight?" Red Jake asked abruptly.

"Yes, of course."

"Did you ever see two men licked quicker, or more completely, since you were hatched?"

The gambler was obliged to admit that he never did.

"Thar's the hull thing in a nutshell!" Red Jake answered.

"Three of my ribs are broken, and my right arm is in such a state that the doctor thinks I will be lucky if I get any good out of it inside a month. Jack's left arm is done for, and his collar bone is cracked, the Doc is afeard, and if both of us hadn't got skulls like an ox, they would have been smashed for sure."

"Oh, there isn't any doubt that you were very roughly handled, but when you get over your hurts it will not take you long to square the account."

"Waal, I ain't a-saying that if I got a good chance with a gun or a knife at this hyer old mountain-man I wouldn't be apt to go for him, that is if I could get him in such a fix I knew he couldn't fight, but for me to run up ag'in' that old galoot again and be in a condition to use his weapons—no, sir, not in mine, thank you."

"I have got all I want!"

The gambler was considerably disappointed when he saw that Red Jake was not disposed to go any further in the affair.

"Why, I say, Jake, old fellow, you haven't got half as much sand as I gave you credit for possessing!" he declared.

"Oh, is that so?"

"It is true! I never thought you would be satisfied to have a man like this old scout crow over you!"

"That is all right! I may be a big idiot, but I know enuff to understand when I have got enuff," the ruffian responded.

"This old cuss is a bigger chief than I am. Why, jest look at it, Handsome, he don't make no pretension to be a fist-fighter, yet he cleaned me out without any trouble. I never got sich a smash in the mug since I was weaned! Durn me! if I hadn't knowed w'ot hit me, I would have believed I was kicked by a mule!"

"Oh, it was just an accidental blow, that was all," the gambler asserted.

"Mebbe so, but, sport, you kin bet all you are worth that I am not going to run up ag'in' any more accidental blows of that sort if I know myself," the ruffian replied.

"Then you are going to be content to allow the old man to enjoy his victory without trying to get square?"

"You are right, I am!" Red Jake declared, in the most positive manner.

"I ain't hankering to try the thing on ag'in. He is too much for me, and though I would like to take your money fu'st-rate, yet as I don't see any chance for me to win a trick, I reckon I would be a fool to go into the game."

"Well, my idea was that you made the mistake of holding the man too cheaply, and now that you have ascertained just what kind of a fighter he was you would be able to make a better show with him, and then, too, the next time, instead of tackling him with your fists, you would use a weapon," the gambler argued.

"Oh, yes, I understand all about that!" the ruffian exclaimed in an impatient way. "But I am not in it! As I said afore I am satisfied."

"I have been whipped clean out of my boots and I reckon I may think myself durned lucky that I got off as well as I did."

"Well, I don't exactly see how you could have been much worse off," the gambler remarked.

"You don't?"

"No, it seems to me that you have been hammered within an inch of your life now."

"He might have fixed me for planting, you know," the other observed.

"Yes, that is true."

"I reckon he would do it too if I gave him another chance at me!" Red Jake declared.

Handsome Harry saw that it would be only a waste of time for him to endeavor to change the ruffian's opinion and so after a few consoling words he took his departure.

CHAPTER XII.

THE HALF-BREED.

The gambler was sorely disappointed.

He had expected to find the ruffian furious on account of his defeat and burning with a desire to be avenged upon his conqueror, and nothing was further from his thoughts than the idea that Red Jake would be content to drop the matter without seeking revenge.

As Handsome Harry passed through the bar-room he stopped to exchange a word with Chicken Bill.

"He's pretty well cut up ain't he?" that worthy exclaimed.

"Yes, but he doesn't take the matter as I expected he would," the gambler replied. "My idea was that he would be just crazy for a chance to get at the old scout so as to square the thing, but he says he is satisfied and don't intend to do any more."

Chicken Bill shook his head and then, leaning over the counter, said in a hoarse whisper:

"Between you and me and the bed-post, Handsome, Red Jake ain't got half the sand that folks give him credit for having."

"Well, I must say that it really looks like it."

"Oh, yes, it is a sure-enuff fact, and thar ain't no two ways about it!" the saloon-keeper declared.

"I reckoned with you that the man would not be satisfied until he had a chance to get squar', and I had no idee that he wouldn't go for Injun Pete, red-hot, the furst chance he got, until I tried to console him by saying that as soon as he got well he could everlastingly salivate the old cuss, and he clean took my breath away by saying he was satisfied to let things be as they are."

"Yes, that is what he told me."

"The thing is going to hurt Red Jake in this hyer town!" Chicken Bill declared. "The boys are already beginning to allow that he ain't half so big a chief as he made himself out to be."

"Oh, there isn't any doubt that he has lost ground, and he will lose more when it becomes generally known that he isn't going to try Injun Pete on again."

"Yes, that is so."

"But the trouble is as you say, Chicken, the man lacks sand."

"Say!—tain't any of my business, you know, but ain't you a leetle interested in this matter?" the saloon-keeper asked, abruptly.

"Red Jake has been saying something, I suppose?"

"Not much, but he let on to me that if he succeeded in laying the old scout out, it would put some ducats in his pocket," Chicken Bill explained. "And as I am no slouch when it comes to guessing, but jest as able to put two and two together as any man you ever saw, I reckoned that as you had been to see Red Jake, and I know you to be a man who is business from the word go, that, mebbe, you had a finger in the pie."

"Say, you understand, Handsome, that I am talking this for business, you know?" the saloon-keeper continued, laying his forefinger in an impressive way on the breast of the other.

"If it was you who put up the job on Injun Pete, of course you are a little disappointed at the way the old thing has worked, but I reckon I kin give you a tip which may be worth something to you."

"I would be glad to get it, of course," the gambler immediately declared. "And you can rely upon it that I would do as much for you some time."

"Do you know a galoot named Yaller Jose?"

"No."

"He is a half-breed."

"I never met him."

"When I say that he is a half-breed, perhaps I ain't giving it to you as straight as I might, for the cuss is a made-up compound of Injun, white man and Mexican, and it would puzzle the devil himself to tell which one of the three is the strongest in the galoot."

"He must be an interesting character."

The cuss is a reg'lar p'ison sarprint, and don't you forget it!" Chicken Bill declared emphatically.

"When the yellow-skinned cuss is with the Injuns he wears all the red-skin toggery, and any one to look at him would take the galoot to be a full-blooded buck, but if he gets on a Mexican dress, then he looks for all the world like a Greaser, and then ag'in, when he is rigged up like a miner, no one would suspicion that there was anything odd about him."

"I see that you are well-acquainted with the man."

"Oh, you kin bet all you are worth that I know him clear through, and, as I said afore, he is a p'ison cuss!" Chicken Bill declared.

"He is a hanger-on to White Owl's band of 'Paches'."

"That is the worst crowd of all, I believe."

"I reckon you are right," the other replied. "White Owl is 'bout as bad an Injun as you kin scare up, and his young men, as he calls 'em, ain't much better."

"This Yaller Jose is a squaw man; that is, you know, he has an Injun wife, but he don't stay with the red-skins all the time, but does a heap of loafing around the settlements, for he is awful fond of bug-juice and a born gambler. When he is in town, he generally hangs out 'round my place hyer."

"The cuss has a mighty bad reputation, and a good many people believe that he used to come in and hang around the settlements so as to give the Injuns p'int—post 'em, you know, 'bout whar to strike so as to pick up the most stock and truck."

"A sort of spy."

"Yes; wa-al, I don't doubt that it is true, and many a time I have heered men sw'ar that they would cut the yaller cuss up inter mince-meat the next time they saw him, but he allers managed to talk himself out of the scrape somehow, for the feller has got the smoothest way of talking that you ever heered, and he is up to snuff too if ever a man was."

"He is awful cunning and in some way he got the notion that you had put Red Jake up to tackle Injun Pete."

"Is that so?" the gambler exclaimed, considerably astonished by the information.

"So he let on to me, thinking I knew something about the matter you know," the saloon-keeper replied. "This was after the fight, you understand."

The other nodded.

"In course I had my own ideas 'bout the matter, but I didn't let on to him," Chicken Bill explained. "All I said was, that mebbe it might be so, but I didn't know anything 'bout the matter."

"Then the yaller cuss winked at me in a knowing way and he said, said he, 'Red Jake is no good to lay out a man like Injun Pete; if anybody wants a job of that kind done they ought to come to a man like myself who understand all 'bout these scouts and know jest how to get at them, and if you see Handsome Harry jest tell him what I say,' and though I ain't sart'in that thar is anything in the matter I thought it wouldn't do any harm to let you understand the rights of the thing."

"I am glad you did. I always like to be posted. You can depend upon it that I will do as much for you some time."

"Where will I be apt to find Yellow Jose?" the gambler asked in conclusion.

"Wa-al, I can't tell you exactly, but he is likely to come in hyer at any time, and if you want to see him I will tell him so."

"Yes, and then he can drop in to my place. You think that he means business?"

"No doubt 'bout it!" the saloon-keeper declared.

"That is the kind of man he is. He would not trouble himself 'bout the matter if he had not got some kind of a game in his head."

"It will not do any harm for him to come and see me even if we do not do any business together," Handsome Harry remarked as he took his departure.

When he arrived at his own place he found Dick Delmayne and Tim Higgins anxiously awaiting his report.

"The game is up as far as Red Jake is concerned," he announced, and then he related the particulars of his interview with the wounded ruffian, winding up with the saloon-keeper's advice in regard to the half-breed.

"I have heered tell on that fellow!" Higgins immediately declared. "And I should not be a bit surprised if you could make some kind of a trade with him."

"He is a different kind of a man from Red Jake, you know," Higgins added.

"Jake is a good deal of a blower, and likes to brag 'bout what he has done and what he kin do, but the half-breed ain't that kind of a rooster at all. He is a quiet, deep feller, who never

does any bragging, but is jest old business from the word, go!"

The three discussed the matter at some length and made up their minds that it would be wise for them to come to some arrangement with the half-breed if it was possible.

The next morning, bright and early, a dark-faced, wiry-looking man, dressed like a miner, made his appearance and said his name was Yellow Jose.

"How are you?" said Handsome Harry greeting him cordially. "Chicken Bill was speaking to me about you. Help yourself to a chair."

The half-breed seated himself; then he looked around him in a suspicious way.

"Oh, it is all right!" the gambler exclaimed. "You need not fear that any one will ever hear what we say. If you mean business you can spit it right out."

"It was you who put Red Jake up to attack Injun Pete?" Yellow Jose remarked in a questioning tone.

"Now what put that idea into your head?" Handsome asked, curious to learn how it was that this stranger could have hit upon the truth.

"I was in the saloon at the time the trouble occurred, and I had my eyes on you," the half-breed explained.

"You were standing in the doorway and as I am one who has made a study of men's faces I could easily see from the expression upon yours that you took a great interest in the matter, and when Red Jake, and his companion, were handled so roughly your disappointment was evident."

"Then, too, an hour or two before the trouble occurred I was in Chicken Bill's saloon and heard Red Jake boast that although he did not have any money then he would have plenty before he was a day older."

"That is the trouble with all men of the Red Jake stamp," the half-breed added. "They cannot hold their tongues."

"It is true," the gambler observed. "They must do just so much blowing, and so often let the cat out of the bag."

"As in this case," Yellow Jose said with a knowing shake of the head.

"When I saw Red Jake pick a quarrel with the old scout it was plain that he had no reason for so doing, and immediately suspected he had been hired to do so, and that was where his money was coming from; then when I made the discovery that you were interested in the matter it was easy to conjecture that you were the party who was to pay the money."

"Yes, but why should I take any interest in the matter—what is the old scout to me?" Handsome Harry asked.

The half-breed shook his head and chuckled:

"Ah, now you are too much for me!" he exclaimed. "Besides I am not the kind of man to bother my head about matters which do not concern me. What is it to me? nothing!"

"That is true."

"But if it is a fact that you bear Injun Pete a grudge, and are anxious to get him in trouble, then I think I can take a hand in the affair. I am always glad to make a little money, you know; then, too, Injun Pete has crossed my path a half a dozen times in the past, and I would be glad to strike a blow at him, particularly if I was going to be well paid for doing it."

"Well, in this matter, I am acting for a friend of mine who has not only got it in for Injun Pete but also for this stranger, this John Randolph, with whom the old scout has gone into partnership."

"Yes, I understand," the half-breed observed. "The two are about to set out on a prospecting tour, up in the Apache-land, I suspect, although Injun Pete talks about going to the southward, but he is one of the kind of men who is wise enough to keep his business to himself, and when he says that he is going to the south, it will be safe to say that he will not go in that direction."

"He is a cunning old rascal, and the man who gets ahead of him will have to get up early in the morning," the gambler declared.

"What will it be worth to your friend to have both of these men settled?" the half-breed asked, lowering his voice almost to a whisper.

"A hundred dollars apiece," Handsome Harry replied, in the same cautious tone.

Yellow Jose shook his head.

"I do not think anything can be done for so small a sum," he replied.

"That is the limit!" the gambler exclaimed firmly. "And it is just double what Red Jake was to get."

The half-breed meditated over the matter for a moment, then, as if convinced that the sport would not increase his offer, said:

"Very well; if two hundred is the best that you can do, I suppose I will have to be satisfied with it."

"How do you propose to work the trick?" the gambler asked.

"I think that it is certain that the two intend to go up into Apache-land."

"Yes, I do not think there is a doubt about it."

"You have heard of White Owl, the Apache chief?"

Handsome Harry nodded.

"I married a squaw who belongs to his tribe."

"So I understood."

"And on that account the red-men consider me a brother, and I am always welcome in the Apache lodges."

"I think I understand your idea," Handsome Harry remarked, in a thoughtful way. "If Injun Pete and this stranger go up into the Apache-land, you will set White Owl and his Apaches after them."

"Yes, that is the game I will play," the half-breed replied.

"I do not see any reason why that will not work," the gambler observed, after thinking over the matter for a few moments.

"That is, if you can get the Indians to undertake the job."

"There will not be any difficulty about that," Yellow Jose asserted, confidently.

"The Apaches have promised not to molest any white men in the future, you know, and after the sound thrashing that the troops gave them, I should think they would be a little skeery about doing anything likely to make trouble."

Yellow Jose laughed in a contemptuous way.

"White Owl and his Apaches are not children!" the half-breed declared. "And if they attack the old scout and his companion, they will manage the matter so that no one will know anything about the affair."

"That would be the proper game to play, of course."

"Then, too, White Owl and his warriors hate the old scout. Injun Pete has been a thorn in their side for years, and they would be glad to get a chance at him, and you can depend upon it that if they succeed in catching him at a disadvantage, they will not hesitate to put him where he will not trouble anybody again."

"I know that the Apaches have always tried to keep the white men out of their land, but I had an idea they were so broken up by this last war, that they would not be apt to trouble the miners in the future."

"Yes, that is true," the half-breed replied in a mournful way. "The very flower of the Apache braves perished in the fight, and the red chiefs are not strong enough now to keep the white men out of their land, but for all that it will not be wise for the miners to come up into the Apache-land unless there is a goodly number in a party, for if the Apaches get a chance, they will be apt to wipe out any two or three men whom they catch in the mountains, if there is a prospect that the affair can be managed without any one knowing anything about it."

"Well, if I was a miner, I should not care about visiting it, for in a wilderness like that, if the red-skins did go for parties of miners every now and then, it would be a difficult matter to bring the deed home to the men who did the job."

"Yes, that is what I think, and that is why I feel confident that I can get White Owl to settle Injun Pete just as soon as he hears that the old scout is up in his territory."

"Well, the two hundred dollars are ready for you just as soon as you bring me proof that Injun Pete and his pard are done for."

"You will soon be called upon for the cash!" the half-breed declared, and then he departed.

CHAPTER XIII.

A BRACE OF RASCALS.

AFTER the half-breed had gone, a sudden thought came to Handsome Harry and he hurried to the door and called to Yellow Jose to return.

When the half-breed was back again, with the door closed behind him, the gambler said:

"By the way, there was something which I neglected to mention which may be useful to you."

"I will be glad to hear it," the half-breed replied. "For this is going to be a difficult job, and I want to pick up all the information I can."

"Well, I think I can give you a pointer in regard to the part of the country to which the old scout intends to go."

"If you can do that it will save a lot of trouble!" Yellow Jose declared.

"There is a valley up in the mountains where a peculiar glittering rock is found, a rock which a tenderfoot would take to be full of gold."

"Ah, yes, I have heard of such a thing."

"I understood Injun Pete to say that this peculiar rock can only be found in one particular valley in this neighborhood, and to that valley he is going."

The half-breed shook his head.

"It does not afford you any information?" the gambler asked.

"No, I have heard of this fool's gold, as it is called, but I did not know that it could be found anywhere in the neighborhood of Crazy Camp."

"Well, I may be wrong in regard to that point; I may have misunderstood him. The valley to which he is bound may not be in the neighborhood of this camp."

"I do not think it is, or else I would know of it," Yellow Jose answered. "But I will tell White Owl about the matter and he may know the locality where this glittering rock can be found. He will be certain to know the spot if it is in the Apache-land."

And then again Yellow Jose went forth.

The gambler watched him depart, a peculiar look in his dark eyes.

"I think the rascal lies!" he muttered. "He knows the valley well enough where this glittering rock can be found, yet for some reason is not willing to admit the fact. It does not make any difference to me though. If he will settle Injun Pete and his pard I will be satisfied."

Then Handsome Harry sought Dick Delmayne and his companion, Higgins, and to them related the particulars of his interview with the half-breed.

Leaving the three to speculate in regard to the issue of the plot, we will follow the footsteps of Yellow Jose.

He went straight through the town until he passed the furthest house, then climbed the hillside and joined a medium-sized fellow dressed like a miner, but whose dark face and peculiar cast of features betrayed that he was also a half-breed, who sat on a rock in a secluded spot, evidently waiting for the coming of Yellow Jose.

This fellow was known as Little Pedro, although he was not particularly small, being about as big a man as Yellow Jose.

He was also a squaw man, being the husband of one of the women of White Owl's village.

"Did you strike anything?" Little Pedro asked as Yellow Jose took a seat on the rock by his side.

"Yes," and then the half-breed related the conversation between himself and the gambler, but instead of two hundred he placed the amount at one.

The other objected to the figure as being too small.

"Fifty apiece is not enough!" Little Pedro declared. "It ought to be a hundred at the least."

"It was all he would give, and I took it on the principle that half a loaf was better than none."

"That is true, but Injun Pete is no common man, and it would be a better speculation to take the job of settling some ordinary miner at ten dollars than such a man as the old scout at fifty."

"The plan that I suggested to Handsome Harry was to get White Owl and his Apaches to do the work."

"Oh, but where would we come in?" the other immediately demanded.

"That is a point to be considered truly," Yellow Jose averred.

"Yes, I should say so!" Little Pedro exclaimed, in a grumbling way.

"White Owl is no fool, you know, and he would be sure to suspect there was some money in the affair, and he would not be willing to take hold of it without he could have the lion's share."

"Exactly, that is just the conclusion to which I came," Yellow Jose replied.

"But I talked White Owl and his Apaches to Handsome Harry, you understand, because, if we succeed in doing the job, it is best he should believe the Indians did the work."

"Ah, yes, I see!" Little Pedro exclaimed, with an approving nod. "That is right; then, if there should be any row kicked up about the matter, White Owl and his braves will come in for the blame."

"That was my calculation," Yellow Jose remarked with a shrewd smile. "And all the time that I was talking White Owl and his Indians to the gambler I had made up my mind that we could do the job and pocket the money."

"Certainly! We would be a pair of fools to allow White Owl to have a share, and he would be sure to want the biggest part of the money, too."

"Oh, yes; the old chief is never willing to make a fair division, but we will work the game ourselves without troubling him to take a hand in the matter."

"We must be careful, of course, how we proceed, for Injun Pete is always on his guard, and we must be extra smart in order to take him by surprise," Yellow Jose continued.

"Yes, you are right, and the only chance we have for success is to ambush him, for if we attempted to lay him out in a fair fight, the odds are big that he would get the best of it."

"No doubt about that!" Yellow Jose declared. "And that is just where Red Jake made a big mistake. If he had not been fool enough to imagine he could get the best of the old scout in a fair fight he would not be laying on the flat of his back now."

"It was a very stupid proceeding!" the other exclaimed, shaking his head with an air of deep disgust.

"In some way Handsome Harry contrived to find out that the old scout thinks of going to a valley where the glittering rock which is called fool's gold can be found."

"Why, there is only one spot anywhere in the

Apache country where the fool's gold abounds!" Little Pedro declared.

"White Rock Valley?"

"Yes; I have never seen any of the glittering rock anywhere else."

"Neither have I, and so I suppose it is safe to assume that Injun Pete is bound for White Rock Valley."

"I always had an idea that there was gold in that region," Little Pedro observed, thoughtfully. "But although I have searched the ground over pretty thoroughly yet I was never able to find any."

"I pretended to Handsome Harry that I did not know where the glittering rock could be found, for I too have always had an idea that there was gold in the neighborhood, and I thought it wise to make him believe that the valley was so far off as to be unknown to us men who are familiar with the Apache-land."

"Yes, it was a good idea, for if there is gold there we are the fellows who ought to find it."

"Of course it is not certain that Injun Pete is bound for White Rock Valley, although I think the chances are good that he is, but our game will be to keep a watch on him so that he cannot leave the camp without our knowledge, and then we must track him until he reaches his destination."

"My idea, you see, is not to attack him until he reaches the point where he intends to prospect for gold, for if the old fox has found good color, there is no reason why we should not profit by his knowledge," Yellow Jose added.

"You are right; we would be foolish to attack him until he leads us to the spot where he thinks the chances are good for finding gold."

And the rascally pair, having come to this conclusion, set about the work.

They found a convenient hiding-place in the neighborhood of the hotel, and the watch began.

And so it happened that Injun Pete's cunning plan to leave the town without allowing anybody to know that he was going, was set at naught, for as one of the half-breeds was always on the watch, his departure was detected, although with his pard he left the town about half an hour after midnight.

Injun Pete waited until the saloons were all closed, the streets deserted, and the town buried in slumber.

Then, having made arrangements so he could get his burro at any time, he went to the corral, loaded his beast of burden, and departed with his pard, John Randolph, stealing forth like a thief in the night.

But, even though he had taken all these precautions and believed himself to be safe from observation, yet the old mountain-man did not take the Northern trail, the way in which he really intended to go; on the contrary, he went to the south and proceeded for a good half mile, then he faced about and circled around the town, keeping well away from it until he gained the northern trail.

"Thar," he said, in accents of satisfaction, to his companion, "I don't think it is likely that anybody is playing the spy upon us, but some feller may be on the watch to catch a point, and this hyer little double will be apt to throw him off."

Randolph nodded assent, and the two went on up into the mountains, the trail growing wilder and rougher as they proceeded.

Even the old scout, with all his skill in mountain and prairie craft, had no suspicion that his footsteps were tracked by a couple of trailers whose abilities at this sort of thing were nearly equal to his own.

It was a good forty miles from the town of Crazy Camp to the little valley where the old scout expected to find gold, and it took the pair a little over two days to make the journey, during the last twenty miles, they were obliged to abandon the trail and make their way as they could through the rough and broken country.

But in this matter the old scout's knowledge of the mountain wilderness came in well.

He followed the course of a little stream as it came down from the mountains, and so was able to make his way up into the hills.

When the pair went into camp that night Injun Pete announced that on the following morning they would enter the valley where he believed the Lost Mine to be situated.

"It is only about five miles more," the old scout said. "But I thought that as we are about played out—and no wonder, for the matter—today has been a tough one—it would be better to go into camp than to attempt to push on and reach the valley to-night."

"Yes, I think you are wise to rest until morning," Randolph observed.

Supper was then prepared, and after the frugal meal was dispatched the two men lighted their pipes and extended themselves upon the soft turf.

"We have made pretty good time, considering the roughness of the road," Injun Pete remarked. "I have not tried to hurry, you know, but just came on at a steady jog, calculating to come 'bout so many miles a day."

"I think we have done very well," the other remarked. "Although I don't know as I ought

to set myself up for a judge, for this is my first experience at this sort of thing."

"Wa-al, pardner, we couldn't have made this hyer trip in this way a few years ago," the old mountain-man remarked in a contemplative way.

"Is that so?"

"Yes, sir, you kin bet all you are worth that it is! The Apaches would have been swarming around us, jest for all the world like a lot of angry bees when their hive is disturbed."

"Mebbe—you ain't posted in regard to the smoke signal of these 'tarnel red-skins?"

"No, I am not; in fact, all I know about the Indians is what I have gained from reading."

"Wa-al, you kin bet your life that I know the pesky red snakes from the beginning to the end!" the old mountain-man declared.

"You have been on the frontier for years and you ought to be well-posted."

"I am, and though I say it myself, I reckon you won't find a man in the Territory who knows the red devils better!" Injun Pete declared, emphatically.

"But 'bout these hyer smoke signals. The red bucks had a reg'lar kind of a telegraph."

"In the old times some of the warriors were always on the lookout, and they had the thing so arranged that the moment that a party of white men set foot in the Injun Territory some of the red devils would be sure to discover it, and the moment the thing was found out the red bucks would kindle a leetle fire and smother it in such a way as to send a thin column of smoke a-soaring up, and the red-skins had the smoke signals so arranged that the style of the smoke told whether there was a big party of whites or a small one, and also whether the copper-colored varmints were to hurry forward to fight the intruders or take their time about it."

"I see; by means of these smoke signals the red-skins were enabled to concentrate their forces so as to give the invading whites a warm reception."

"You bet!" the old scout declared.

"Why, pard, they had these smoke signal business down so fine that inside of an hour every warrior within a hundred miles could be warned that danger threatened and his aid was needed."

"You have not seen any smoke signals this time though?"

"Nary one! and I am mighty glad of it too, for the pair of us couldn't do much ag'in' half a hundred red braves, and that would be the way they would be apt to come down on us."

"An Injun never has no idea of fair play, you know."

"His best holt in war is allers to pitch in five or ten to one so as to make a sure thing of it; that is the kind of game that the red bucks allers try to play, and if you were to tell 'em that man to man was the right thing, they would think you were clean off your base, as that ain't the way they are brought up at all."

"I suppose that if you had discovered the Indians were on the alert you would not have dared to come on?" Randolph observed.

"No, siree, I wouldn't by a jugful!" the old mountain-man replied.

"Why, it would have been a reg'lar tempting of Providence—going into a game, you know, with the dead certainty that you were going to get skinned out of your boots before you got through with the thing."

"That would not be wise, certainly."

"By the way, has this valley to which we are bound any name?"

"Sart'in! the Injuns call it White Rock Valley on account of a big white rock which stands in the middle of it."

"Aha! I think we are on the right track to reach the spot which I came to find!" Randolph declared.

CHAPTER XIV.

ON THE RIGHT TRACK.

"Do you mean that?" the old mountain-man inquired.

"Yes; you remember that I told you about a man who came from the West and was assaulted in New York?"

"Yes, the cuss who died in the hospital."

"Exactly; his name was Murphy—Spotted Tom Murphy."

"Sho!" exclaimed the old mountain-man. "Why, I knowed him well enuff! He and a man named Jim Grahame used to go together."

"Grahame was a peculiar sort of a galoot, an odd cuss who never had much to say to anybody."

"You know that he was the man who discovered the Lost Mine, but you don't know that when he died he intrusted the secret to Spotted Tom Murphy, who was to carry it to his—Grahame's—daughter in New York, but in some way a gang of crooks got wind of the matter, and in attempting to get the secret from Murphy, they injured him so that he died," Randolph explained.

"My idea is that these crooks were posted

concerning Murphy's errand to New York by some man in this region."

"This fellow, Tim Higgins, was mixed up in the business, for he was the spy who tracked Murphy from Crazy Camp to New York, and as he and this gambler, Handsome Harry, are so thick, the chances are that the sport is the man who is at the back of the affair."

"Blame me if it don't seem so!" Injun Pete declared.

"Murphy was out of his head from the time of the assault until he died, and he was affected in such a peculiar way that he could not talk."

"All that could be got out of him was a single sentence, which he repeated over and over again, and that sentence, to my thinking, has some reference to the secret of the Lost Mine."

"Sho! you don't say so?"

"Judge for yourself, for this is what he said: A white dome-shaped rock—get three pines on a line with the rock, and twenty paces from the third pine, at a right angle, is the spot."

"That is the very identical rock for sure which is in the center of White Rock Valley, and which gives the place its name!" the old mountain-man declared.

"A white, dome-shaped rock, eh?"

"Yes, the description fits to a hair!"

"And how about the pines?"

"Oh, there are gobs on 'em!"

"I am on the right track then?"

"Not a mite of doubt 'bout it!" the old scout declared, in the most emphatic manner.

"The fool's gold rock is 'bout a hundred feet from white rock, further up the valley, and I reckoned that the Lost Mine was somewhar in the neighborhood."

"I do not think there is a doubt but that you are right!" Randolph exclaimed. "But if the Lost Mine is in the neighborhood of the white rock—only a few paces from it, according to this description, how comes it that it has not been more often found?"

"Wa-al, in the first place it has allers been as much as a man's life was worth to come up into this region on account of the 'tarnel red-skins, and then as this hyer country don't look like one where a man would be apt to find good 'color,' the most of the prospectors have given it a wide berth," the old mountain-man explained.

"And when you come to git a look at this White Rock Valley I reckon you will find that it ain't much like what you expected to see from the name."

"It is the roughest old valley that ever you struck in all your born days, full of trees and bushes and rocks, and sich a collection of rocks can't be beat in this hyer Territory I will bet a hat!"

"Well, I must say that it is not the kind of place that I expected to see."

"No, I s'pose you were thinking of some nice, little, level valley?"

"Yes, something of the sort."

"Wa-al, pard, you will hardly find a level place big enuff to swing a cat!" Injun Pete responded.

"It is all rocks from leetle over the size of my head, to big ones which would make a miner's cabin look sick."

"The place must be wild and desolate, indeed."

"I was telling a German professor once 'bout the valley, and he was a cuss who knew more 'bout rocks than any other man I ever run across, but he was sich a durned dry joker that it was hard work to tell when he was in earnest and when he wasn't, and he said he knew how it was that the rocks come to be piled on top of one another in sich an outlandish way."

"Then he spun a yarn 'bout how in the old days, when thar was a lot of giants, the big men got to fighting, and these rocks were the ones that they heaved at each other, and that was how they came to be piled all up in a heap."

Then the old mountain-man chuckled as the remembrance of the German's comical tale came back to him.

"And in amid these rocks the bushes and trees grow, I suppose?"

"Yes, sart'in, wherever they kin git a foothold."

"It is not strange, then, that the whereabouts of the Lost Mine has not been discovered more often."

"That is the p'int!" Injun Pete asserted. "The country is so darned rough and broken up, that I reckon a man might be within a couple of yards of the mouth of the mine, and yet not be able to see it."

"But with this hyer direction of yours to go on, it will be durned strange if we can't hit on the right spot."

"Oh, I do not think there is any doubt but what we will be able to find the mine."

"By the way, our arrangement is to share and share alike, I believe?" Randolph said, abruptly.

"Yes, that is the idee."

"Well, I am not working for myself in this matter," the other remarked.

"How's that?"

"I represent James Grahame's daughter, Violet," Randolph replied.

"The girl, you understand, whom Spotted Tom Murphy was seeking when he was struck

down and fatally injured by these crooks. By accident I happened to be in the neighborhood when the attack was made and so became mixed up in the affair."

"By profession I am a detective and my name is Joseph Phenix."

And it was indeed the celebrated man-hunter, the hero of a hundred desperate adventures, masquerading in this strange disguise.

"Wa-al, now, do you know that I reckoned you wasn't no common man!" the old scout declared.

"I see'd right from the beginning that you could be classed as A No. 1, and the way you laid that air Jack Smithers out convinced me that you was one of the kind of men that it would do to tie to."

"It was a fight between the crooks in New York and myself," Joe Phenix explained.

Hereafter we shall call the man-hunter by his right name.

"I did not succeed in bringing them to look for the attack on Murphy as I desired, but I kept after them so they did not have much peace, and when I heard that the principal man had disappeared from the city, I immediately came to the conclusion that he had come West to try and get the treasure, the secret to which he had gained by the use of a bludgeon, and I hastened to arrive on the scene of action before him."

"From the way things have turned out, though, I suspect that this New York, crook Dick Delmayne, who is the man I am after, and Tim Higgins, are in Crazy Camp, but they are keeping in the background so as to escape notice."

"Mebbe so."

"If I am correct in this supposition it would explain the attack made on us in the saloon."

"Yas, that is so," the old mountain-man said in a thoughtful way. "Thar ain't much doubt that somebody put the two cusses up to go fer us, for unless they had been egged on by somebody they would not have been apt to trouble themselves about us."

"It has become a matter of personal pride with me," Joe Phenix explained. "I don't relish having these crooks get the best of me, and that is why I have taken the trouble to come to Arizona."

"I did not succeed in mailing my men in New York, so when I learned that the principal crook was missing from his usual haunts I jumped to the conclusion that he had come West after the treasure, and I made up my mind to beat his game if I could."

"Wa-al, pardner, it 'pears to me that you have got a little the best of the thing now."

"Yes, it certainly seems as if I had the inside track."

CHAPTER XV.

THE WARNING.

By this time the two had finished their pipes, and Injun Pete rolled himself in his blanket preparatory to getting a few hours' sleep while the detective kept watch.

The old mountain-man had arranged all the details of the trip with the greatest carefulness. Since coming into the Indian country no fires had been built, for, as the old scout explained, the smoke would be apt to cause some inquisitive red-skins to look into the matter, and although the Apaches were now supposed to be at peace with the whites, yet Injun Pete did not trust the "varmints," as he termed them.

A regular watch was kept.

Joe Phenix was on guard from nine to one and then the old scout took post as sentinel while the other slept.

As Injun Pete explained to his companion, from one o'clock to three was the dangerous time, for the Indians when they wanted to surprise a white camp usually made their attack during the "small hours" of the morning.

In ten minutes the old scout was fast asleep.

The detective leaned his back against a rock, and, with his rifle laid over his lap, ready for action, kept his lonely vigil.

Slowly the hours passed away until it was time for Injun Pete to relieve the detective.

The old mountain-man awoke promptly to the minute.

"All quiet, hey?"

"Yes, there does not seem to be even an animal stirring in the neighborhood."

"Wa-al, this is sich a durned rough country that even the birds and beasts appear to give it the go-by," the old scout rejoined.

Then Joe Phenix wrapped himself in a blanket and in a few minutes was sound in slumber's chain.

For an hour or so Injun Pete kept watch without anything occurring to excite his notice.

He had pitched his camp in an open spot so that it was not possible for any one to approach without being perceived.

Then, all of a sudden, his quick ears detected a sound which denoted that something was wrong in the neighborhood.

He was on the alert in a moment.

The sound came from a clump of bushes about two hundred feet away.

Injun Pete's finger was on the trigger of his rifle and he had the weapon leveled at the bushes when forth from the covert stepped the white-

bearded old man who called himself Jocrisse the Juggler.

There was a new moon whose light, faint as it was, enabled objects to be distinguished without difficulty, so the scout was able to recognize the old man as soon as he appeared.

"Wa-al, durn my cats! if he ain't 'bout the last man I expected to see up in this region!" Injun Pete muttered.

He had the old man "covered" with his rifle, for the moment the eagle-eyed mountain-man perceived there was something alive in the bushes he brought his weapon to his shoulder.

The old man saw that he was threatened by the leveled rifle, and extended both his hands with open palms, giving the Indian peace sign.

Injun Pete nodded to signify that he understood, and, lowering his rifle, replaced it on his lap.

The old man came rapidly on, moving with noiseless tread, and when he reached Injun Pete's side he took a seat upon a rock which cropped out of the earth.

"What are you doing up hyer—lost your way?" Injun Pete asked.

"Oh, no: I am prospecting for gold now," the old man replied in a confidential way.

"The fact is, I can not make a living by my juggling tricks; the miners have become tired of my performances, and they are not willing now to give liberally when I pass around the hat, so I must look out for another way to get my living, and I thought I would try my luck as a prospector."

"Ah, yes, I see. Wa-al, have you struck it rich yet?"

"No, but then I have only just commenced, and I cannot expect to succeed right at the beginning."

"You had better be keerful how you wander 'round up in this region," the scout warned.

"This is the Apache-land, you understand, and the first thing you know the reds will be after your top-knot."

"Oh, no, there isn't any danger of that. The Indians are all very friendly with me," the old man explained.

"I have visited their villages and amused them with my juggling tricks, and there isn't any of them who would harm me."

Injun Pete was satisfied that this was the truth.

The North American Indians are like the Arabs of the desert—whom they so greatly resemble in many particulars as to lead to the belief that the two have a common origin—they look upon those unfortunates destitute of reason as being under the direct protection of the Great Spirit, therefore it was more than likely that the old man could wander where he pleased, through the Indian country, without danger of being molested by the red-skins, although many of them would, no doubt, be glad of the chance to rob and murder any single white man who was unlucky enough to come in their way.

"Wa-al, you are all hunky then!" the mountain-man declared.

"And I tell you, pard, it is a mighty big advantage you possess, for there isn't many white men whom the red-skins would not trouble."

"You do not seem to be afraid of the Indians, though," the other rejoined.

"Oh, wa-al, I have been playing hide-and-seek with them for so long, that I have kinder got used to dodging the 'tarnel varmints!" the mountain-man declared.

"So you do not fear to penetrate into these wilds?" the old man remarked in a reflective way.

"No, I take my chances, you know."

The old man looked around, surveying all objects in the neighborhood with a critical eye.

"You are acting with rare caution," he observed. "You do not kindle a fire for fear that the smoke will betray your whereabouts."

"That is the ideal!"

"You have always treated me well!" the old man exclaimed, abruptly. "When you were present at one of my performances you never failed to contribute liberally when I passed around the hat, and you never jeered at me and said I was a fraud, if anything went wrong during the exhibition."

"I allers believe in giving every man a show. That is my platform, and I live right up to it!" Injun Pete declared.

"Then, if you remember, on one occasion when some rude, rough men were disposed to ill-treat me, you interfered and drove them away."

"Yas, a lot of ornery, drunken curs!" the mountain-man exclaimed. "It was a real pleasure to make sich worthless truck git up and dust!"

"I have a long memory, and ingratitude I consider to be one of the basest of sins, and now that I have a chance to do you a service, I am glad to avail myself of it."

The scout looked surprised.

"A chance to do me a service?" he said.

"Yes; I suppose I ought to have told you before," the old man replied, thoughtfully; "but you see I was a little perplexed."

"Your companion here I do not like," and he nodded to where the detective slept in his blanket.

"He interfered with me once. I was getting

up an act which would have electrified the world. He came upon me as I was rehearsing, and upset the affair completely. I had secured Daddy High-card's daughter to assist me, and he took her away, so I owe him a grudge for that!" And the old man shook his head in an angry way at the sleeping man.

Injun Pete comprehended that the old lunatic had been up to some mad prank which the detective had prevented him from carrying out.

"Wa-al, I have allers found him to be a pretty good sort of a chap," Injun Pete declared.

"I have a very bad opinion of him, and if he had not been with you I should have allowed matters to go on without troubling myself to interfere," the old man responded.

"What is the mischief, anyway?" Injun Pete asked, a little in doubt as to whether the old man possessed any information of value, or if his talk was due to the vagaries of a disordered brain.

"For the last month or so the sun has been so hot that it affects my head so I crouch like a deer in a thicket by day and prospect by night," the old man explained.

"Yesterday I found a secluded nook in a clump of pines about ten miles south of this point, and from my covert I saw you pass, then half an hour later two Indians came along, and I perceived at once that they were following on your trail."

"A pair of bucks, eh?" the scout exclaimed, immediately becoming interested.

"Yes, they were not in war-paint, but fully armed, and as they examined the ground carefully as they advanced, and took exactly the same course as you did, it was evident to me that they were tracking you."

"Oh, yes, I reckon thar isn't much doubt in regard to that."

"I hesitated for quite a time in regard to what I should do," the old man explained. "I wanted to warn you, but I had just as lief the red-skins would get your companion as not," and the speaker cast a glance full of hatred at the sleeping Joe Phenix.

"But after I debated the matter I came to the resolve that I ought to warn you that the Indians are on your track, even though I did your companion a service also, so I circled around and having made a calculation that you would camp somewhere in this neighborhood, laid in wait for you."

"Wa-al, I am much obliged, and I will do as much for you some time."

"Two bucks, you say?"

"Yes, only two."

"Did they seem to be in a hurry as if they wanted to overtake us?"

"No, they were going along at about the same pace that you proceeded."

"I reckon the cusses have got it into their heads that we are bound for some particular spot and they are waiting for us to git thar and go to work afore they jump in on us," the scout observed.

"Yes, that seems to me to be probable."

"The burro and the tools would show them that we are arter gold, and as we haven't stopped to prospect anywhere, they would be apt to argue that we were bound for a certain place, for these red devils are mighty smart in coming to a conclusion of that kind."

"It is likely."

"Wa-al, old man, I am ever so much obliged, and, thanks to your warning I reckon I will be able to put up a job on these red bucks which will be apt to make their hair stand on end, and if I can't I ain't the man I think I am!"

CHAPTER XVI.

PREPARING A TRAP.

"I AM glad that I was able to give you the warning," the old man remarked. "But it is for your sake alone that I have taken the trouble. If your companion had been by himself, I would not have stirred a finger to aid him. He is a very ignorant, bigoted man, and by his untimely interference spoiled an act which would have coined me money."

"Have you any idea whar these red-skins are now?" Injun Pete asked.

"Yes, they have gone into camp on the crest of a hill about four miles off. I watched them until I was satisfied they had settled down for the night before I came to warn you."

"They are using just the same precautions as yourself—do not kindle any fire, and while one sleeps the other keeps watch."

"What is your idea of their little game?" the mountain-man asked.

"They mean mischief, of course, but as they are only two against two—their plan will be to take you unawares. Your tools show that you are after gold; and they will wait until you strike your lead, and get to work, then they will seize some favorable opportunity to attack you; but now that I have put you on your guard you ought to be able to take care of yourself," and as he came to the end of the sentence the old man rose to depart.

"Oh, I reckon they won't catch me napping, not if I know myself, and I think I do!" Injun Pete declared.

"Well, I wish you luck," the old man said in

his grave and solemn way, and then he departed, gliding over the ground in an extremely ghost-like fashion.

The mountain-man watched him until he disappeared in the gloom which hung around the distant pines, then Injun Pete shook his head slowly.

"I don't like this ar' thing at all, no way you kin fix it!" he muttered. "These two red devils mean mischief or else they wouldn't hang around our trail."

"That is what I think," Joe Phenix remarked, abruptly, rising to a sitting posture as he spoke.

"Hello! are you awake?"

"Yes, I am a light sleeper and the slightest sound is usually sufficient to awaken me, so the moment the old man spoke I was roused."

"He has got it in for you, by the way."

"So I see," and the detective smiled.

Then he related the two strange adventures which had befallen him on the road to the mining camp, winding up with the declaration that he had come to the conclusion Crazy Camp was aptly named, if the majority of the inhabitants resembled this pair of lunatics whom he had encountered.

"The camp got its name from two brothers who first settled in the valley, both of whom were a little cracked in the upper story, and when they came for their supplies, and told how well they were doing, everybody laughed at them, thinking the thing was all a yarn, you know, and, in derision, the boys called the strike Crazy Camp, but when one of the brothers brought in a nugget one day worth a couple of hundred dollars, it kinder opened people's eyes and thar was the biggest kind of a rush for the valley right away, but the name of Crazy Camp stuck to it all the same."

"Yes, that was natural under the circumstances. But what do you think about this matter?"

"Oh, the red devils mean mischief, of course, no doubt about that."

"Well, what course shall we adopt?"

"Wa-al, now, that is jest what is a-bothering me!" the old mountain-man declared.

"If this was a time of open war, you know, when it was allowable for reds and whites to kill each other on sight, with the knowledge that I now possess 'bout these cusses hanging on to our trail, I would jest lay a trap for them."

"I would double on the trail, lay in ambush for them, and when the pesky varmints came along I would fill 'em so full of holes that they wouldn't stand water!"

"Under the circumstances though you rather hesitate to do that," the detective remarked in a thoughtful way.

"Yes, that is a fact, although I reckon I am a little foolish to hesitate, for I don't doubt the pair of reds would go for us in a moment, if they got a good chance."

"No doubt!"

"But in spite of that fact I don't kinder relish the idee of wiping 'em out in cold blood."

"I agree with you there."

"Suppose we lay a trap for them," Joe Phenix continued. "Arrange it in such a way as to come upon them suddenly and put the question right to them—'What do you two men mean by following upon our trail? Do you want war? if so, you can have it as soon as you like. If you don't, then go about your business, and leave us to attend to ours!'"

"That is it! You have hit the mark right plumb in the center this time, and no mistake!" the old mountain-man declared, emphatically.

"That is just the little game that we must play, and I reckon we had better set out 'bout it as soon as possible."

"Oh, yes, the quicker we bring the thing to a head the better."

"This hyer valley is as good a place as we kin strike, I reckon," Injun Pete affirmed as he took a look around him.

"I should think it would answer, although I cannot set myself up as a judge, for although I have passed a good many years in man-hunting yet I have always pursued my game in a big city and have no experience in a country like this."

"Wa-al, hyer's the pints," the old scout replied.

"We will start right away. Unless the reds are extra good trailers—men away up at the top of the heap, you understand, they will never be able to tell whether we pulled up stakes at two or five, but the three hours earlier start will enable us to cover six miles easy enough, but we won't go but 'bout two, then we'll find some thicket whar we kin hide the burro away, after that we'll come back hyer and jest go into ambush."

"Yes, I see, and when our men come along, we will call them to an account!"

"Exactly; that is our game, and, by the way they talk we kin decide how to proceed."

"Yes, that point cannot be settled now."

Having come to this conclusion, the two proceeded to execute the plan, which was carried out exactly as the old mountain-man had proposed.

The burro was concealed in a thicket, and then taking a different path from the one by

which they had come, the two returned to the valley where they had camped and sought shelter in a clump of pines about a hundred feet from the spot where they had passed the night; the coming of the morning light found the pair ready for the approach of the red-skins.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SURPRISE.

With their rifles ready, the hammers raised, the adventurers waited.

Few words passed between the two, for as the old scout remarked, when they crouched beneath the shelter of the pines:

"We must lay low and keep as still as mice, for some of these durned red-skins seem to be able to almost smell a white man, no matter how carefully he hides himself away.

"Keep quiet until I give the word and then we'll rise up, William Riley, and give these 'tarnel red galoots the biggest kind of a surprise party!"

Slowly the minutes passed away; the light grew stronger and stronger, and then the rosy flush which heralded the coming of the sun spread over the sky.

"I reckon I hear 'em!" the quick-eared scout whispered to the detective.

"Yes, I fancied I heard something," the other replied.

The surmise was correct.

Up from the southward, following the plainly defiled trail left by the hoofs of the burro, came two forms, clad in the picturesque Indian garb.

That they were trailing the adventurers was evident, for they came on with their eyes bent on the ground, and when they reached the spot where the pair had camped, they came to a halt.

"Here is where they passed the night," said the foremost one of the two, speaking as perfect English as though he had never talked in any other tongue.

"Yes," responded the other, "and they evidently made an early start this morning, for the earth on the edge of the burro's track is beginning to crumble, which shows that it was some time since it was made."

"It looks as if they were bound for White Rock Valley," said the feather-garnished chief who had first spoken.

"Yes, they are certainly heading in that direction, and perhaps it would be as well for us to stop following on the trail for fear that we might run into them. Make a circle around, you know, and enter White Rock Valley from the upper end."

"Yes, I think that is a good idea."

"There is plenty of cover there, you know."

"True, and we would not have any trouble about getting shelter."

"Let us be going, then."

"We will bend off to the left, and make a circle around yonder hill."

And then the two started in a direction which led them right by the clump of pines in which the old mountain-man and the detective lay concealed.

Ten steps the two took, and then, to their utter amazement, out from the pines came the white men, with leveled rifles.

The pair came to an abrupt halt.

Never were two men more taken by surprise, or at a worse advantage.

Their rifles were carried in the hollow of their arms, the hammers down, while the newcomers had theirs all in readiness to send forth the death-dealing balls.

Little wonder was it that the pair stood aghast.

"Shell out your we'pons now—come, lively!" the old mountain-man commanded.

"You are in the tightest kind of a place, and if you are wise you will do jest as you are told!"

"What is the meaning of this?" the foremost of the pair inquired. "Why should we give up our weapons?"

"Oh, come now, you can't pull no wool over my eyes!" Injun Pete declared.

"I know you two galoots like a book, Yellow Jose and Little Pedro!"

And it was indeed the two half-breeds who had been thus deftly entrapped.

They had changed their rough miner's dress for the Indian buckskin, and at a little distance no one would have imagined that they were not full-blooded red-skins.

"Come! down with your we'pons now, and no foolishness, or I will let daylight right through you!"

The stern accents of the old mountain-man showed conclusively that he meant what he said, and the half-breeds judged that it would not be wise for them to refrain from complying with the command.

So they laid down their rifles, although it was plain that it was with the greatest reluctance.

"Put your revolvers along with the rifles!" Injun Pete exclaimed.

The pair obeyed.

"Now, then, right-about face and fall back ten paces!" the old mountain-man rejoined.

In a sullen way, their faces dark with impotent rage, the half-breeds complied.

And as they fell back the others advanced until they stood over the weapons.

"I reckon we are in a condition to do a leetle talking now," Injun Pete observed, with a dry chuckle.

"Now then I propose to bring you two orner, yellow cusses right up to the rack.

"What is the meaning of this hyar business anyway? What in thunder are you two galoots a-trailing myself and pardner for? What game are you up to, anyway?"

Little Pedro looked at Yellow Jose as much as to say, "You had better do the talking," and the other, understanding that it would be useless for him to attempt to deny the truth, for he knew that the white men must have overheard the conversation between himself and his companion in regard to the matter, cudgeled his brains to find some explanation that would satisfy the old mountain-man.

So, after a little hesitation, he said:

"Well, there is no great harm done; Little Pedro and I were after game when we saw you go up into the Apache-land.

"We knew by the fact that you had a burro with you laden with tools that you were after gold, and so we made up our mind to track you, for we thought that you knew where to go for the gold and if we followed you we might be able to get some."

This explanation was reasonable enough, and as the old scout knew of no reason why the half-breeds should trouble themselves to turn trailers, excepting through a bloodthirsty desire to punish white men for coming into the Indian country, and as Injun Pete did not think it was probable the half-breeds would be so apt to yield to a notion of this sort as the full-blooded Indians, so he was disposed to think the tale was true.

"Wa-al, I am sorry to interfere with your little game, but I have got to," he said.

"I don't propose to find no gold for nobody but myself, and I will have to trouble you to go off about your business and quit picking into mine, 'cos I give you fair warning that if you don't thar will be trouble, 'cos I am not the kind of a man to stand any nonsense from anybody!"

"Oh, that is all right," the half-breed replied.

"The jig is up now, of course. You know our game, and it isn't of any use for us to keep on."

"You will quit then?" Injun Pete asked.

"Yes, allow us to get our weapons; we will depart, and give you our word not to follow on your trail again."

"That is the talk!" the old scout declared.

"This hyer country is plenty big enuff for all on us," he continued. "You go on your way and we will go ours, and thar's no need for our running ag'in' each other at all."

"And as for gold," the old mountain-man continued, after a moment's pause, "thar ain't any certainty that I am going to strike anything worth finding, and I should think that men like yourselves, who are roaming these hyer mountains 'bout all the time, would be a heap sight more likely to strike pay-dirt than anybody else."

"The red-men cannot smell out the gold like the pale-face!" Yellow Jose declared.

"One thing is sart'in, if the red bucks found good color they wouldn't work to git out the stuff themselves," the old mountain-man declared, in a contemptuous way.

"If the squaws could do the digging it would be all right, but the chiefs themselves wouldn't."

"The red-men despise toil and consider work fit only for squaws and slaves," the half-breed replied. "But my companion and myself are half-breeds, and if we found gold we would be willing to dig to get it."

"Of course, but I have no doubt that it would be a heap-sight easier, and a durned sight more agreeable for you to wait until my pard and myself had dug the gold and then jump on us and take it away," the old scout suggested, with a shrewd chuckle.

"In the time of war that would be all right, of course, but we are at peace now," Yellow Jose replied, in a fawning way.

"And you wouldn't do sich a thing, of course?" Injun Pete observed.

"Oh, no, certainly not!" Yellow Jose answered, trying to look as honest as possible.

"The devil doubt you!" the old mountain-man muttered. And then he said aloud:

"Wa-al, if you are willing to go on about your business, and not trouble your heads 'bout ours any more, I s'pose you kin take your we'pons and git as soon as you like."

As he spoke Injun Pete stepped back a pace, Joe Phenix following his example.

"Oh, yes, you can depend upon it that we will not trouble ourselves about you any more!" Yellow Jose declared, in his smooth, oily way, and then he advanced and took his weapons, his companion doing the same.

"Good luck go with you, Injun Pete!" Yellow Jose exclaimed as he turned upon his heel.

"Yes, much good luck!" cried Little Pedro as he marched off with his companion.

The old scout watched them for a minute or so, then he shook his head and said in a rapid, cautious tone to Joe Phenix:

"Keep your eyes open and be on your guard! I do not trust either of those fellows! They are

a couple of snakes, and it is my idea that they mean mischief.

"I have formed a decidedly unfavorable impression of them myself," the detective declared.

"See that your rifle is all ready for action," the old mountain-man cautioned.

"It would be just like the treacherous cusses to reckon that they had pulled the wool over our eyes, and go for to gi'n us a shot, thinking to catch us napping."

"Yes, a man should always be on his guard when dealing with scoundrels like this precious pair, for there is no telling when they will attempt mischief."

By this time the two were about a hundred feet off; then, suddenly, they wheeled about, their rifles flew to their shoulders and they fired at the whites.

Injun Pete's quick eyes had noted the halt which preceded the movement, and he had been prompt to warn his companion:

"Look out!" he cried, "they are going to sock it to us! You take the tail cuss and I will attend to the little one!"

Thanks to the quick perceptions of the old mountain-man, the attempt to surprise the whites was not a success, for the two had their men covered, and the report of their rifles sung out on the mountain air in advance of the discharge of the guns of the half-breeds.

A better, or quicker, marksman than old Injun Pete the Arizonian wilds had never known and his bullet went as straight to the mark as it was possible for it to go.

Little Pedro, shot right through the heart—for the old mountain man understood that in a case like this it was either kill or be killed—pitched forward on his face and the bullet from his rifle whistled harmlessly, high in the air, over the heads of the white men.

Joe Phenix, although a good shot as city men go, that is, speaking of those who were accustomed to rifle-practice—yet not being used to shooting in this way did not succeed in hitting his man, but he managed to send his bullet so close to the ears of Yellow Jose that, as it whistled by, it caused that worthy to duck his head, as though he expected he could succeed in dodging a rifle ball.

It was an involuntary movement though and, slight as it was, destroyed the half-breed's aim and the bullet which he had destined for the breast of the old mountain-man lodged in his left shoulder.

As Injun Pete had a repeating-rifle he was able to promptly return the shot, and his bullet, striking the half-breed in the chest, laid him low.

It was a short fight but a bloody one.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE MASTERS OF THE LAND.

"HOORAY! we've beat 'em!" the old mountain-man exclaimed in glee, and he hurried forward to where the half-breeds were groveling in the dust.

Joe Phenix followed him in haste.

As we have said, Little Pedro had fallen upon his face; he sprawled upon the earth with outstretched arms and legs like a huge frog, and as he had not moved since he went down it was plain the deadly rifle ball had closed his account with this world.

Yellow Jose went down upon his side and as the white men came up, he rolled over upon his back and glared with angry eyes up in their faces.

"Wa-al, you would have it, wouldn't ye?" Injun Pete exclaimed in a reflective way.

"You couldn't take good advice when it was given you."

"If you two had gone about your business, like a couple of honest men, this hyer thing wouldn't have happened, but reg'lar old Satan got inter you! You had to go in for war, and you have got war too red hot, I reckon!"

"The Apaches will some time make you pay dearly for this day's work!" the half-breed declared, sullenly.

"Mebbe they will," the old mountain-man responded, with a dry chuckle.

"I reckon the red-skins have got a pretty big account piled up ag'in' me now, and, as you say, some time, if they are lucky, they may be able to squar' the reckoning, but you kin bet your life that I am going to do all I kin to put the thing off!"

At this point Joe Phenix noticed that the old scout was bleeding.

"You are wounded!" the detective exclaimed.

"There is blood coming from your shoulder!"

"Yas, this galoot's bullet kinder scratched me thar a leetle, I reckon. I thought so arter he let drive at me, but it don't amount to nothing. I never 'low sich leetle scratches to trouble me any," the old mountain-man replied.

"How is it with you, Yaller?" Injun Pete continued, addressing the half-breed.

"You went down all in a heap, jest as if you were plugged for keeps, but you don't seem to be bleeding much, and for a man who has got his baggage checked for the happy hunting-grounds, you 'pear to be tolerable pert and lively."

"Your ball struck me in the chest, here," and the half-breed placed his hand upon his right side.

"At first I fancied that it had torn a hole right through me, and when I felt I did not believe I had ten minutes of life left, but now, although the wound is painful, yet I am feeling all right otherwise."

"The chances are big that the ball struck a rib and glanced around to your side," Injun Pete remarked.

The old mountain-man had had so much experience with gunshot wounds, that he was about as good as a doctor.

"If you like I will take a look at the thing," the scout continued.

"Although you did go for me in a way I despise, and I did my level best to fix you for planting, yet now that you are stretched upon your back and the fight is over I will be hanged if I want to harm you."

"Tain't in my nature for me to strike a feller when he is down, so, if you want me to, I will take a look at your wound and see if I can do anything for it."

The half-breed looked at the old mountain-man for a moment as though he suspected there was some mischief in the offer, but the face of the scout was the face of honesty itself, and there was no guile written thereon.

"All right! although I reckon you can't do much for me," Yellow Jose remarked in an ungracious way, for the generosity of the offer bothered him, it was so different from what he and his red brother would have been apt to do under similar circumstances.

The Apaches have but little mercy upon a fallen and helpless foe, and if their positions had been reversed the half-breed would have been much more likely to put a knife into his antagonist than to endeavor to ease the pain of his wound.

The scout made an examination and soon discovered that it was as he had anticipated, the ball had struck a rib, been deflected to the side, and had passed out, inflicting a bad flesh wound, but one that was not at all likely to prove dangerous if proper care was taken of it.

This information the old mountain-man imparted to the half-breed, and Yellow Jose was visibly cheered up by the intelligence.

"Oh, well, that is not so bad," he remarked. "When I went down though I thought I was done for."

"Oh, no, that is where you made a mistake!" the old scout declared. "You are worth a dozen dead men yet."

"A month or so will see you as good as new!"

Just as this exclamation left the lips of the mountain-man a "surprise party," as Injun Pete would have said, was sprung upon the group which made them open their eyes in wonder.

One moment the adventurers and the wounded man were alone in the rocky glen, apparently not another soul within miles, and then, hey, presto! from behind the giant boulders, amid the clump of pines, and junipers, and stunted oaks, here and there, in an irregular circle completely surrounding the group in the center of the glen, appeared the swarthy faces and buckskin clad limbs of the Apache warriors.

With the stillness of so many stealthy shadows from the other world the dusky warriors had approached, and not the slightest indication had they given of their presence until they had the group in the glen completely surrounded.

The moment the whites beheld the swarthy faces glaring upon them they brought their rifles to their shoulders, and the Apaches like a lot of imitative monkeys performed the same maneuver.

"It is no use, pard, don't fire!" the old mountain-man exclaimed in a quick undertone to his companion. "The red hawks have got us foul this time, for sure, and if we attempt to fight we will only be throwing our lives away?"

Then out from a clump of pines at the lower end of the valley stepped a middle-aged, brawny chieftain.

He was unusually muscular in build, and very dark complexioned even for an Indian.

The magnificence of his dress—his hunting-shirt and leggings being so ornamented by fringe and beads that the original buckskin was almost hidden—the necklace of bear's teeth and claws suspended around his neck, the eagle plumes braided in his hair, all betokened that he was a great chief, for no lesser light would be allowed to parade in such finery.

The moment the warrior made his appearance the old mountain-man recognized him.

"It is the White Owl!" he exclaimed in an undertone to Joe Phenix. "One of the greatest chieftains that the Apache natives has ever known, a wily, shrewd red varmint, and as ruthless a butcher, when he had things his own way, as any buckskinned devil that ever stepped foot on prairie or mountain land."

The red chief stretched out his brawny right arm and shook his forefinger at the adventurers.

"Let the white chiefs drop their rifles to the ground," the Apache leader cried, in a deep and sonorous voice.

"If they are wise they will not attempt to dispute the possession of this land with the red

warriors, for if they do they will soon be food for the wolves."

"Wa-al, chief, as I reckon as how it is your say-so this time, I suppose thar ain't much use for us to differ with you!" the old mountain-man declared, and as he spoke he let the butt of his rifle drop to the ground.

Joe Phenix followed his example. In such a case as this he knew that it was best for him to be guided by the scout.

"You are wise not to resist, for you are in the presence of the masters of the land!" the old red chief declared with great dignity.

And then he advanced until he stood by the side of the white men.

The Apaches also came from their hiding-places, and gathered in a circle surrounding the group a hundred feet or so away.

There were some thirty warriors all told, and from their weapons, and the fact that none of them were in war-paint, it was evident they were a hunting-party.

The abrupt and unexpected appearance of the red chiefs was easily accounted for.

The warriors had been after game, and the sound of the shots having attracted their attention, they had cautiously approached the locality from which the sounds had proceeded, and so had been able to surprise the adventurers.

When the White Owl looked upon the dead body of Little Pedro, and then surveyed the wounded half-breed, a heavy scowl came over his dark face.

"What is the meaning of this?" the old chief cried in an angry tone.

"Who has dared to give to the death one of the young braves of the Apache nation and also stricken down the Young Horse?"

White Owl called Yellow Jose by the name which he bore in the tribe.

"Wa-al, chief, I reckon I will have to plead guilty to that ar' work," the old mountain-man replied.

"Ah, it is you, Longlegs, with your accursed rifle, who has done the mischief?" the White Owl exclaimed.

Longlegs was the name which the Apaches had bestowed upon the old mountain-man; the name given from the fact that the scout was a marvelous runner, having beaten some of the best of the Indian champions.

"It was a fair fight, White Owl, I want you to understand that!" Injun Pete declared, firmly, not manifesting the least appearance of fear.

"And the quarrel was none of my seeking too; just you put that inter your noddle," the scout added.

"I and my pard hyer were going on quietly attending to our business, when your two young men hyer jumped in on our trail, and when I discovered that I was a-being tracked I jest called 'em to account; I told 'em, right plain too, that I wanted them to hump themselves off and attend to their own business. I reckoned too that they were a-going to do it, for they went off peaceable enuff until they got to a sart'in distance, when they turned round and let fly at us, but that ar' is a game, White Owl, that two kin play at, and no man ever accused me of being backward in coming forward when sich work was going on."

"Longlegs is a great chief!" the Apache leader declared with a stately nod of his massive head. "Many an Apache squaw has sung the death-song for a brave sent to the happy hunting-grounds by the rifle of the White warrior."

"But allers in a fair fight, chief!" the old mountain-man exclaimed. "You will have to own up to that; and I never was the man to pick a fuss, either. I never went for one of your warriors, if he didn't come for me. My idee allers was to mind my own business, but if any of your braves were so pesky eager for a fight, that they couldn't keep quiet and had to jump on me, I allers did my level best to make the thing interesting."

"But this is the time of peace!" the old chieftain declared with great dignity. "There is no war now between the Apaches and the white braves."

"Sart'in! that is as true as Gospel!" the old mountain-man rejoined.

"But I want you to understand, White Owl, that this fight was none of my seeking. I didn't want to salivate your young men," Injun Pete continued.

"I am a man of peace at all times, and even if you red bucks and the sodgers are trying to knock spots out of each other, I never thought thar was any call for me to chip in, unless I hired right out to the sodgers as a guide, or something of that sort."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE TRIAL.

THE Apache chieftain knit his heavy brows, surveyed the old mountain-man for a moment, then shook his head in an ominous way.

"My white brother, Longlegs, is a great talker," the Indian warrior declared. "He is like the bird that sings in the tree."

"His song confuses the senses, and if a man is not on his guard he is apt to be led astray."

"Oh, no! I am giving it to you as straight as a string!" Injun Pete declared.

"You know me of old, chief; I am no liar, but always speak with a straight tongue, and what I have said to you is the truth, so help me Bob!"

Again the Indian chieftain shook his massive head, and the look upon his face grew darker.

"This is not the first time, Longlegs, that the Apache braves have caught you upon their land, and you always sing the peace song with a smooth, straight tongue!" the White Owl declared.

"When the red warriors surround you, then you cry out that you come meaning to do harm to no one, but when you come upon an Apache brave, single-handed and alone, then your voice is for war, and it is his life or yours."

"Oh, no, 'tain't that way at all!" the old mountain-man protested. "You have got the thing entirely wrong."

"It is your young men who are to blame! When one, or two, or three of them run foul of me up in this country, then they git hungry for my scalp right away, and it ain't in the nature of a man like me, you know, to let anybody lift his ha'r, if he kin help it."

"It is jest as I tell you, I have allers given your young men the squarest kind of a fight, and if they ain't got the medicine to get away with a chap 'bout my size, then I ought not to be blamed for the thing."

"You ought to know your braves well enuff to understand that I am telling you the truth."

"You know that in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, when a red warrior runs across a white man up in this region, he does his best to wipe him out!"

"That is right!" the old chieftain declared in the most haughty, arrogant way possible. "Is not this the Apache-land?"

"What has that got to do with it?" declared Injun Pete, bluntly.

"It is the Indian's country, and the white man has no business to set his foot in it."

"Sho! ain't you taking pretty high ground?" the old mountain-man exclaimed.

"You don't mean to say that every white man forfeits his life if he dares to come up into this country?"

"Yes, that is just what I mean!" the savage chief retorted.

"This is the Apache-land, and it is death to any white man who dares to set foot within its border!"

"Git out! that doctrine is altogether too steep to go down!" the old mountain-man declared in a fearless way.

"You ought to know that you can't enforce any such law as that."

"Twenty years ago, when the Apaches were ten times as powerful as they are now, and thar war only one white man in this country whar thar are a hundred at the present time, thar might be some reason in your talking that way, but now it ain't anything but durned foolishness."

"I know that you are as obstinate a cuss as ever trod in moccasins, but I thought that the last war had knocked some sense even into your head."

"Didn't the sodgers lick you bad enuff to make you understand that the day had gone by when you could do as you like, even up in the Apache-land?"

It was a bold speech, and there was not a dusky face in the circle which did not wear a frown, from the great chieftain, the White Owl, down to the meanest warrior in the party.

A dozen hands at least clutched knife or rifle, and the wild, red warriors thirsted for the blood of the bold speaker who dared thus openly to beard them right on their native hills.

"The blue-coated chiefs are dogs!" the old Apache chieftain flamed forth furiously. "And if they had not been aided by the false-hearted red-men who acted as scouts and guides leading the white warriors up to the mountain-homes of the Apaches, where they had their squaws and children, the red warriors would have cut them off to a man!"

"It was war, chief, and you ought not to complain if the sodgers gave you a dose of your own medicine," the mountain-man retorted.

"When you come down on the white settlers, you think that their wives and children are fair game, and you oughtn't to growl if the troops raid your villages."

"The white men are dogs!" the chieftain declared. "And the red chiefs will some day have a bloody vengeance for the past!"

"Oh, what is the use of talking that way?" Injun Pete exclaimed. "If you know anything you ought to be satisfied by this time that you cannot hope to contend with the white men."

"As I was saying, twenty or thirty years ago the thing was mighty different."

"Then there was two Injuns to every white man, but now the situation has altered, and thar is ten, or twenty, or maybe, a hundred white men to every red brave."

"Jest take this last campaign—wasn't you licked right out of your boots, and in mighty short order too?"

"In the old days an Injun war would last six

months, or more, but the last skirmish was wound up in two weeks.

"Some of your young men run off a settler's stock, and killed a couple of herdsmen. The bucks were traced right to your village, and when you refused to give them up, and talked fight the sodgers went for you in double-quick time.

"What was the result?

"You lost twenty-five or thirty of your best warriors, your ponies were run off or killed, your villages destroyed, and, in short, you and your people suffered worse than you ever suffered in a war before, and r'ally, chief, I should think the result of the thing would be to knock some sense into the thickest-headed Indian that ever put on feathers and paint."

This plain speaking angered the Indians, and their rage was the greater because they knew that every word of the old mountain-man's speech was true.

The war had been a frightfully disastrous one, and the red-skins suffered more than they had ever suffered before.

The general in command of the district was an old and experienced Indian-fighter, and when the outbreak occurred, a causeless one, due only to the evil passions of the young bucks, impatient of restraint, he made up his mind to give the red warriors a lesson which they would be apt to remember for some time, and so he put his troops in the field in light marching order, organized a force of Indian scouts, and hunted the savages through the Indian country, giving no rest by night or day, but keeping them continually on the move, until even the iron-limbed warriors were completely tired out.

Their favorite plan of only fighting when all the advantages of numbers and position were on their side would not work this time, and finally, when brought to bay, they were compelled to give battle in a locality which they never would have chosen if they had had any choice in the matter, and the result was a bloody and awful defeat.

"You white dog! do you dare to taunt the Apache chieftain in the Apache-land?" the old warrior exclaimed, his face dark with rage, and he shook his clinched fist in the face of the old mountain-man.

But Injun Pete faced the angry savage as undauntedly as though he had an army at his back.

"Oh, come now, go slow!" he rejoined.

"What in thunder is the use of gitting mad about the matter?

"I hain't said a word that isn't the truth, and you know it!

"Myself and pard are all alone up in your Injun country, and it looks as if you would do what you liked with us, and nothing to hinder; but I want you to understand that if you are calculating in that way you are making a big mistake.

"Back of us stand the sodgers, and back of them the bull b'iling of the white men, and you ought to know that you and your red braves, in comparison with the whites, are as a jack-rabbit to a buffalo bull.

"If you reds dare to buck up ag'in' the white man, you will be blotted right out of existence!"

Bold words, and few men situated as was the old scout would have dared to utter them.

But in his judgment he was pursuing the proper course.

No man in all the wide wild West knew the Indians better.

Courage above all other qualities is the one which the ruthless, yet wily, red chiefs hold most in esteem, and the old mountain-man lost no advantage in thus boldly "cheeking" the Apache warriors in the heart of their own territory.

The White Owl shook his head as the buffalo bull shakes his shaggy frontispiece when the leaden bullets of the hunters rattle against it.

Like the beast the chieftain was not hurt, but he was annoyed.

He knew full well that the old mountain-man had not spoken anything but the truth.

The wily Indian understood that the power of the Indians was broken, and it would only be utter madness to attempt to brave the anger of the whites.

Another war, as vigorously prosecuted as the last, would be apt to sweep the Apaches from the face of the earth.

But he had the daring old mountain-man in his grip.

At last, a helpless prisoner, he held the adventuring scout who had been a thorn in the side of the red-men for years, and having secured such an advantage he was not disposed to relinquish it if it were possible to arrange the matter otherwise.

"Talk is cheap!" the Night Owl declared, with an air of great dignity. "And warriors should not battle like a lot of children.

"I am the red king of the Apache-land, and though the white chiefs did triumph when the red warriors met them with rifle and knife, yet the Apache braves are not yet slave."

"No, nobody said that they were, but they mustn't think they are so durned big that they kin butcher white men in cold blood jest because

they come into the Apache country," Injun Pete retorted, tartly.

"But the White Owl is the chief of his tribe, and he has the right to execute justice in his own territory!" the brave declared, with an air which showed that he considered himself to be every inch a king.

"When your own people are concerned, possibly, but you have no call to interfere with white men," Injun Pete answered.

"If a white man kills an Indian warrior in the Apache-land, can not the White Owl try, condemn and punish him?" the savage chief demanded, with an angry frown.

"Nary time!" the old mountain-man responded immediately.

"It is your right to catch the man and hand him over for trial to the whites.

"Nobody ever gave you the power of life and death where a pale-face is concerned!"

"By the great Wahcondah!" blazed forth the Apache chieftain in sullen rage. "You will find that I will take the power."

"You will be called to a red-hot account if you do!" the undaunted scout responded.

"Bah! I cannot be frightened by words!" the Indian chieftain declared.

"Your hands are red with the blood of my young warriors, and the deed calls aloud for vengeance!"

"It was a fair fight, I tell you!" the old mountain-man affirmed.

"Your braves were to blame, for if they had gone along and attended to their own business the thing would not have happened. But they were hungry for war—they wanted a fight, and they got it.

"Mighty few men kin go about in this world with chips on their shoulders, anxious for somebody to knock 'em off, without being accommodated."

"Young Horse speak!" exclaimed the Apache chieftain. "Tell the story of this trouble. Your tongue is straight and from it the truth will come!"

The half-breed hesitated for a moment.

For a brief space he wavered; his better angel whispered to him that by telling the truth about the matter the whites would escape punishment, for the Indian code is the same as that which rules the frontier; if two men quarrel and the fight be fair, no advantage being taken on either side, blame cannot be attached to the one who is fortunate enough to prove the victor in the contest.

But only for a brief fleeting moment did Yellow Jose hesitate.

Then before his eyes rose a vision of the two hundred dollars which the gambler, Handsome Harry, would pay for news that the two white men had paid the debt of nature.

And the moment he thought of the money, all of which he could gain now, as his companion, Little Pedro, was dead, the remembrance of the old scout's clemency faded from his mind.

Again he became the treacherous half-breed, the creature popularly supposed to possess all the vices of both of the races from which he sprung and none of their virtues.

His face hardened and he shook his head.

"I am badly wounded, Little Pedro is dead, and it is all the work of these two white men!" he declared.

"Sart'in! that is the truth, every word of it!" Injun Pete rejoined.

"Nobody is a-disputing that p'int!

"But wasn't the fight a fair one? that is the question before the meeting!"

"No, it was not!" the half-breed responded.

"Why, you 'tarnal lying skunk!" the old mountain-man exclaimed, in angry amazement.

"But I mought have known that you couldn't speak the truth, no way you could fix it! 'Taint in you! You are so used to lying that you have got to lie even when the truth would serve your turn a heap sight better!"

"Be quiet, Longlegs! you babble like an angry squaw!" the Apache chieftain remarked with a great deal of dignity.

"It was not a fair fight, and the white man lies when he says that it was," the half-breed affirmed.

"Oh, what a mistake I made that I didn't settle your hash when I had the chance," the old mountain-man observed with a solemn shake of the head.

"You ain't anything but a snake, anyway, and I don't suppose you kin help it. It is your nature to turn and bite the hand that spared you!"

"Little Pedro and myself were on a hunting expedition when we encountered these two white men," the half-breed said.

"We would have avoided them, but we came upon the two before we suspected that they were in the neighborhood, and the moment they saw us, they began the attack. Little Pedro was killed immediately and I badly wounded. We would have avoided trouble if we could, but the white men sought our lives as soon as they discovered us."

"Longlegs, the young warrior, speaks with a straight tongue, and I believe him!" the Apache chieftain declared with the gravity befitting a judge.

"Oh, you are going on the idea of give a dog a bad name and hang him!" the old mountain-man responded.

"In course I understand the programme jest as well as though I had had the laying out of the thing. You have got it all cut and dried, and I don't suppose that anything I may say will have a mite of influence."

"Why do you charge me with acting in bad faith?" the Apache chieftain demanded, with an assumption of wounded dignity.

"As the Great Spirit is my judge I desire to deal fairly with you, although you are a white intruder in the land of the red-men, who has killed one of my braves and badly wounded another, yet if I was satisfied that you did not make the attack, I would say: 'depart in peace, although you have shed blood yet escaped unharmed!'"

"Oh, no, not by a jugful!" Injun Pete responded immediately.

"I have got a bit of lead in my shoulder that this yaller coon put thar; you kin see the marks of the blood."

All the Apaches looked eagerly at the scout, and there, sure enough, the blood could be distinctly seen staining the hunting-shirt.

"Yes, I saw that he intended to kill me and so I fired at him!" the half-breed declared.

"That is a lie! he tried to fire first!" the old scout declared.

"Now jest open your ears and listen to my leetle yarn, and I kin gi'n you proofs that it is the truth too.

"Myself and pard came up into this hyer district to prospect for gold," he continued.

"We had a burro with us to tote the tools.

"This morning the idee came into my head that somebody was a-following on our trail, so I broke camp airly and lit out; hid the beast in a thicket, then came back and went into ambush.

"Sure enuff, in due time along came these two cusses, a-following on our trail, and they came so near whar we were hid in the pines that we could plainly hear them talk 'bout how they were going to follow us up.

"Then we jumped out at them, ketching 'em at a disadvantage, so that they did not stand any show to use their we'pons.

"Wa-al, I talked to 'em like a Dutch uncle—told 'em to go along and mind their own business, and not to bother their heads about ours.

"They were in a tight place, so they talked smooth and sed they would.

"Off they started, but when they got good and ready they turned about and let drive at us, but my pard and I were on the lookout for jest such a move, and we managed to git fu'st fire."

"It is a lie!" Yellow Jose declared.

"Nary time! the truth and nothing but the truth, so help me Bob!" the old mountain-man retorted.

"As for us I can see it is but word against word!" the Apache chieftain remarked.

"And as it is so why should I not believe my young warriors, whom I have always known to speak with a straight tongue, to you, who have fooled, braved and cheated the red-men for more moons than a man can count?"

"He don't offer you any proof that his words are true, hey?" Injun Pete asked.

"No, but no more do you," the old warrior retorted.

"Yes, but I can!" the scout replied.

"What proof?" the White Owl questioned, with evident reluctance.

It was plain he was not anxious to have the white man back up his statement.

"The great Apache chief is skillful as a trailer?" Injun Pete demanded.

"None more skillful ever trod the Apache land!" the old warrior replied, with a deal of pride.

"So I have heard, and I am glad of it, for if you are one-half as skillful in that line as you are reported to be, you can easily find proof that my story is true, and the yarn of this straight-tongued brave of yours won't hold water."

"I do not understand how that can be," the Apache chieftain said, his suspicions evidently excited.

And as for the rest of the warriors they were all ears.

This trial of wits was a great treat to them, particularly as there was not one in the assemblage who did not feel perfectly sure that the wily old mountain-man was in a snare from which it would not be possible for him to escape.

"Go back on the trail and see if the marks do not prove the truth of my story that we two white men were going quietly along attending to our own business, and your two young men were following on behind us, playing the spy."

The old chief pondered over the matter for a moment.

"I do not see how I can decide anything by examining the trail," he said at last, slowly.

"We did come up along his trail, but we did not pay any attention to it," the half-breed declared, in a sullen way.

"Oh, that is a likely story that you could hang on our trail for miles and yet pay no heed

to it!" the old mountain-man declared, in a tone full of sarcasm.

"It makes no difference; it was but accident plainly," the White Owl decided.

"Then you won't examine the trail? You are going to put it to us, anyway?" Injun Pete cried.

"You shall have justice—yes, justice exactly the same as though you were a red-man!" the White Owl declared.

The shrill notes of a bugle pealed out on the still mountain air.

CHAPTER XX.

A NEW FACTOR.

At the sound of the bugle's silvery notes the Apaches started in alarm and grasped their weapons with a firmer grip.

All within the valley were taken by surprise by the unexpected sound.

From the southward came the bugle call, and when the actors in this strange scene looked in that direction they were surprised to behold a detachment of United States soldiers, some thirty men, headed by a dashing-looking officer who wore upon his shoulders the straps of a major.

The trimmings of the uniforms, as well as the weapons of the soldiers, showed that they belonged to the cavalry and from the fact that they were now on foot, and had approached within a few hundred feet of the group in the center of the valley before they allowed the bugler to give warning of their presence it was plain that they had not stumbled upon the scene by accident but had approached with the deliberate intention of surprising the red-skins.

They had abandoned their horses and stolen in on foot in order to render the surprise complete.

A more disgusted man than the old Apache chieftain when he looked upon the troopers it would have been hard to find in all the Western wilds.

He realized that this unexpected appearance of the boys in blue meant freedom for the two white men.

The wily Apache warrior was too good a fighting-man not to understand that the tables had been suddenly turned and all the advantages at present were with the new-comers.

He was not strong enough to give battle to the soldiers, although in his anger at having his prey thus abruptly snatched from him, the chances are great that if there had been only ten or a dozen soldiers in the party, and he had not been caught at a disadvantage he would have been inclined to show fight.

But as the situation was the troopers outnumbered his warriors, and they had contrived to approach so near before their presence was manifest to him that there was no opportunity for him to seek safety in flight carrying his prisoners with him.

The White Owl understood right at the beginning that he had been outgeneraled. The surprise had been skillfully planned and the movement was a complete success.

The Indian chieftain was not greatly astonished at the fact that the maneuver had been carried out so perfectly when he discovered who was in command of the detachment, although he could not comprehend how the officer could possibly have learned that he and his braves were in the neighborhood.

Major Daniel Castlebar—Dandy Candlestick, as his troopers were wont to call him—was one of the best Indian fighters who had ever worried the red-men of the West.

He was a good-looking man who appeared to be thirty-five or forty years old but in reality was fifty; a soldier who had risen from the ranks during the war of the rebellion, and had fairly won by hard service every grade which he had gained.

At the close of the war he had entered the regular service and during his first Indian campaign had emphatically shown that he was the right man to handle troops in a contest where there was but little glory but plenty of hard work and hard knocks.

It was Dandy Candlestick who had led the expedition which captured the village of the White Owl and inflicted upon the red-men the crushing defeat which had broken the power of that portion of the Apache tribe that acknowledged the White Owl for their great chief.

The troopers advanced with their repeating carbines in their hands, ready for action, while the Indians stared at them in blank dismay.

"Hooray!" exclaimed the old mountain-man, hugely delighted at this entirely unexpected piece of good luck.

"I reckon now that the sight of the boys in blue is about as good for sore eyes as anything that kin be scared up!"

This exciting speech made the old Indian chief scowl.

It was gall and wormwood to him to think that the white men were about to be snatched out of his hands.

The warriors looked at their chief for orders.

They did not relish the idea of a fight under such disadvantages, and yet the soldiers were so close upon them that it would not be possible for

them to escape by flight if the troopers chose to attack them.

The red-skins were between the two horns of a dilemma and which to take they knew not.

"Hello, hello! what is the trouble here?" Major Castlebar exclaimed in his brisk, business-like way as he brought his men to a halt a dozen paces from the group, but advancing himself until he was almost within arm's length of the Apache chieftain.

"Waal, I reckon, major, you might call this a sort of a killing bee!" the old scout replied. "That is, it would be if you and your sodgers hadn't come to the rescue, but as it is you appearing will kinder interfere with the programme."

"I s'pose that it is a big disapp'tment to the White Owl hyer, but me and my pard kin stand it, furst rate!" And as Injun Pete finished the sentence he grinned at the old Apache warrior in a particularly aggravating way.

The scowl upon the face of the red chief grew deeper, and if a look could kill, the fate of the old mountain-man would undoubtedly have been sealed.

"I don't exactly understand this business," the major remarked, looking at the Indian chief as though he craved an explanation.

"These two white men came into the Apache land, killed one of my young men, and badly wounded another!" the White Owl exclaimed, scowling fiercely at the pale-faces as he spoke.

"I captured the white braves, and was about to bring them to an account for their crime, when you and your warriors appeared."

"This is a pretty serious accusation, Injun Pete!" the major declared, with a grave shake of the head.

"What have you to say to it?"

"Tain't so, major!—that is what I say, and what I am ready to sw'ar to!" the old mountain-man responded, promptly.

"The White Owl hasn't given it to you straight!"

"Does the white man dare to tell me to my teeth that I lie?" the Apache chieftain exclaimed, angrily, while his dark eyes fairly flashed fire.

"Oh, you needn't try to skeer me with any of your black looks!" the old mountain-man cried.

"I want you to understand that I wasn't born yesterday, and I am not a man to be frightened by any loud talk or ugly scowls."

"The rights of the matter are just hyer, major: These hyer two young men that the White Owl speaks of, Yellow Jose and Little Pedro, happened to run across the trail of me and my pard, and they took it into their heads that it would be a mighty cunning trick to jump onto us for to wipe us out."

"It is a lie!" the half-breed cried with an angry scowl.

"No, it ain't! It is the truth, and you know it!" Injun Pete rejoined.

"And that is the reason why you are gitting mad about the matter. You know that you were in the wrong, and that you and your pard only got what you deserved."

"You see, major," and the old scout turned to the soldier, "I ain't been a-fooling round this hyer neck of the woods without gitting a few ideas into my knowledge-box, and I reckon the man who catches me asleep, no matter whether he is red or white, black or yaller, or no color at all, will have to git up mighty early in the morning."

"Well, from what I know of you, Injun Pete, I should say that there isn't a doubt about that being the truth," the major declared.

"The two galoots were a-follerin' on the trail of me and my pard, and when I got wind of the thing, I jest laid a trap for them, and the pair tumbled into it as nice as you please."

"If they had been the biggest pair of tenderfeet that had ever struck this section, they couldn't have been more easily fooled!"

And then, to the intense disgust of the half-breed and his friends, the Apaches, the old scout chuckled as though he thought the matter to be a first-class joke.

"Yes, sir-ee!" Injun Pete continued, after a moment's pause. "The galoots laid a trap for me, and then got caught themselves; but arter I got 'em hard and fast—when I got 'em so that me and my pard could have salivated them in the worst kind, we didn't go in for to do it, 'cos it wasn't our leetle game."

"We hadn't got nothing ag'in' no 'Paches, or anybody else for that matter, but we didn't propose to give the galoots a chance to wipe us out and lift our ha'r, and I up and told them so, too—give 'em warning to go off 'bout their business, and let 'em go."

"But they wasn't satisfied; they wanted war, and as soon as they thought there was a chance for their white alley, they turned and let drive at us."

"Me and my pard, though, were on the lookout for jest such a move as that, and so managed to git first fire, and lay out our men."

"It is a lie!" the old Apache chief declared, with a vindictive scowl.

"My young men are too good warriors to be so easily conquered!"

"Oh, you are away off, White Owl!" the scout responded. "Your fighting-men ain't half so good as you try to make 'em out. I have been skirmishing with them for nigh onto thirty years now, and I reckon I am a judge."

"Of course you think they are some pumpkins, but when they come up to the scratch they don't pan out half as much gold to the ton as you reckon they would."

"Well, it seems to me that this is rather a complex case," the major observed. "And I don't see how I can settle the matter, for it strikes me that it is rather out of my province."

"Here are two parties, both of whom declare that they are in the right and the other in the wrong."

"Now this appears to me to be a case for a magistrate, and I am not one."

"Still, when I come to think about the matter," the soldier added, after reflecting upon the subject for a moment, "I don't know as it is an affair which calls for the interference of a legal gentleman—that is if we look at the matter in the light in which it is generally regarded on the frontier, and if the story of Injun Pete is accepted as truth. If there was a fair fight, and one of the duelists fell in the encounter, it is not the custom in this part of the country to hold the victor to an account for his share of the affair."

"One of my young braves has been killed. His blood cries aloud for vengeance," the old Apache chieftain cried.

"In this country I am a king!" the red chieftain continued. "I caught these two white men and I demand blood for blood."

"Was not the crime committed in the land of the Apaches? Have I not the right then, as the chief of Little Colorado tribe, to punish these pale-face braves who have shed the blood of two of my warriors?"

"Oh, no, chief, you are a little out in your reckoning!" Major Castlebar declared, immediately.

"This Apache land, which you claim as yours, is in the Territory of Arizona, and subject to the rule of the white men, therefore, most certainly you have no right to pronounce judgment."

CHAPTER XXI.

A FAIR OFFER.

THIS announcement made the old Apache chieftain very indignant.

His brow grew dark and his bosom swelled.

"Am I a dog that the white men should put their heels upon my neck?" he exclaimed.

"Oh, no; no offense is intended—no affront offered!" the major declared with all the smoothness of a practiced politician.

"But truth is truth and should be spoken."

"In a matter of this kind I do not believe in beating about the bush."

"If these men have committed any crime it is the white men who must try and punish them, if they are found guilty, and it is absolutely certain that neither you, nor any other Apache chieftain, would be allowed to sit in judgment upon them."

"Have not the great chiefs of the Apache tribe always punished their braves when they broke the laws of the red-men?" the old warrior demanded with a great deal of dignity.

"Oh, yes. I do not doubt that that is the truth," Major Castlebar replied.

"But it is a different matter entirely. It has never been the policy of the white men to interfere with the Indians in the management of their affairs, but when it comes to a red chieftain laying violent hands upon a pale-face, then you can depend upon it that there will be trouble."

"The whites would never stand a thing of that kind, you know," the soldier continued.

"But these men have shed the blood of a red warrior!" the old chieftain declared.

"Very true, but even in such a case as that the whites would insist that it was their right to conduct the trial," the major responded.

"Bah! what justice can the red-man expect from the white-skins?" the Apache leader demanded in a lofty way.

"Well, to give you an honest opinion, I do not believe that in a case of this kind any punishment would be inflicted, no matter whether the men were white or red. As I said before, for a fellow to kill his opponent in a fair fight is not regarded as a crime in this region," the soldier remarked.

"Is the blood of my young men then to be shed and the white braves who did the deed to go unharmed?" the White Owl exclaimed with a fearful scowl.

"Say! I kin fix this hyer thing up in a wag of a mule's tail!" the old mountain-man exclaimed, abruptly.

"This hyer red buck is so hot arter vengeance that it seems to me to be the biggest kind of a pity that he can't git a show for to grab on to some."

"Now I ain't the kind of man to allow any galoot to go 'round howling for me to give him satisfaction without trying to do my best to accommodate him."

"Me and my pard hyer cleaned out his two braves in a fair fight, and I reckon we kin do the same for any other two warriors that he kin

scare up in his tribe; so, if he means business, all he has to do is to trot out his braves, and me and my pard will do our best to send them to the happy hunting-grounds."

The red-skins looked a little surprised as this proposition fell upon their ears, and the warriors looked at their chief in a questioning way.

The major was decidedly pleased and rubbed his hands together in a manner which plainly indicated his satisfaction.

"It appears to me that Injun Pete has made you a pretty fair offer, White Owl," he observed.

"Fair!" the old mountain-man exclaimed. "Wa-al, now, you had better believe that it is the squarest kind of an offer, and if the White Owl has got any sand in his craw, he ought to be jest delighted at the chance to show me what extra good fighting-men he has got in his gang."

"I don't bar any warriors that you kin scare up in your tribe," the scout continued. "I am ready to face any fighting-man that you have got, and you kin take a shy at it yourself if you keer to try the thing on, White Owl. I have often heard say that you were a big brave, and I r'ally have a curiosity to find out jist how big a chief you are."

Now the White Owl, although as brave a man as ever put foot in a moccasin, yet was a wily fellow, being considerable of a statesman, and if he had been free to do as he wished would not have ventured to engage in a contest on equal terms with so renowned a warrior as the old mountain-man.

But great as was his fame as a chieftain, yet he knew that if he did not accept the challenge, so boldly and adroitly thrown out by Injun Pete, his reputation would suffer.

Left to his own devices he would not have met Injun Pete, but as it was he could not refuse.

"The white man talks big," the old chieftain remarked with a great deal of dignity.

"Maybe he thinks he can frighten the red warriors by the sound of his voice, but the Apache braves are not children nor dogs to howl and run at a loud word."

"Oh, you are a lot of big guns, the hull on you!" the old mountain-man exclaimed in a scornful way.

"But that ain't neither hyer nor thar. The p'int before the meeting is this—have you and your red bucks got the sand to come up to the scratch?"

"You have got a grudge ag'in' me, and I reckon you have had it for years. Now hyer is a chance for you to git squar', and if your 'Paches are half as big chiefs as you try to make out some on 'em ought to jump at the offer."

"Oh, the white man need not fear that the red braves will not meet him!" the Apache chieftain exclaimed in scornful accents.

"The pale-face chief talks big and it is true that the Apache warriors have sought to take his scalp for many moons, and if they did not succeed it was because the legs of the white man are so long that he can run like the Jack-rabbit and the Apache braves were never able to catch him."

This declaration was made with a fine touch of sarcasm, and both in voice and face the red chieftain expressed the utmost contempt for the old mountain-man.

If it was the design of the old chief to provoke the anger of the scout the attempt was a complete failure, for the old mountain-man laughed in the face of the Indian.

"That is a pretty good yarn to spin!" Injun Pete exclaimed.

"It is true that you red bucks have run me out of the Injun country more times than I have got fingers and toes, but no one, or two, or three of you warriors ever did the job!"

No, siree, you kin bet your bottom dollar on that!" the scout continued emphatically.

"Thar was allers five, or ten, or fifty of your red devils arter me, and if I showed 'em that I had an extra good pair of long legs it was because I didn't stand no chance for to stand and fight."

"But the boot is on the other leg now, you bet! and I am the man prepared to give you all the fight you want, and of all the warriors in the hull 'Pache nation, you, White Owl, are the man whom I am most anxious to get a chance to climb."

"I am your antelope, and I don't keer the wag of a mule's tail how you meet me. It is all one to me how you come at me, rifles, knives, revolvers or fists! I reckon I am good for you anyway you kin fix it!"

"The Apache chief will meet the loud-talking white man and tear his heart from his body!" the old warrior declared, angrily, irritated both by the words and the manner of Injun Pete.

"Mebbe you will, but I doubt it!" the old mountain-man declared.

"I want you to know that I have got it in for you in the worst kind of way!" Injun Pete continued.

"You did a heap of crowing a leetle while ago, when you thought you had me foul, and I didn't stand no show, 'cept to be struck by lightning, but things have changed 'round mightily since then, and now that I have got a chance to show you that you ain't half so big a chief as you think you are, you kin bet all you

are worth that I am going in to warm you in a first-class manner, and, I say, major, how will it do for White Owl and myself to settle this leetle fuss? I don't see as thar is any call for my pard to take a hand unless thar is some 'Pache brave who is so 'tarnel anxious to git a quick passage to the happy hunting-grounds, that he can't afford to wait for the slow process of nature."

The Indians took a look at the stalwart proportions of Joe Phenix, who in muscular attributes far exceeded any of the red-skins, and his appearance, robed in the frontier garb of buckskin which fully displayed his magnificent form, was so formidable that none of the braves felt inclined to test his prowess in a single fight.

"I do not see any objection to the thing being arranged in that way," the soldier remarked.

"The White Owl is known to be one of the greatest warriors in the Apache tribe," the major continued. "And as a fighting-man I reckon, Injun Pete, that you will not have to take a back seat for any scout that ever was known on the border, so you two ought to be well matched."

"I am satisfied to meet Longlegs, and if I cannot avenge the death of my brave I will not complain!" the Apache chieftain declared.

The White Owl was a shrewd observer and he had quickly perceived that none of his warriors were disposed to encounter the stalwart stranger.

"I'm your mutton!" Injun Pete declared. "And the sooner we git at it the better I will be pleased."

"What is your we'pon, White Owl?"

"Knives!" responded the chief.

"That suits me to a dot!" the old mountain-man exclaimed with a grin of satisfaction.

"Tis some time since I have handled a toad-sticker, but I reckon I ain't rusty for all that."

"What are the terms of the fight?" the major asked.

"It is always well to have a clear understanding in regard to a point of that kind before proceeding to operations."

"It is to the death!" the savage chief declared with a malignant scowl.

"That suits me all right!" the old mountain-man declared.

"Thar has been bad blood 'tween the 'Paches and a man 'bout my size for a long time, and I ain't sorry for to git a chance to settle the thing."

"The white man is a snake who for many moons has tried to bite the chiefs of the Apache nation, and now the White Owl will take his scalp and it shall flutter and dry in the smoke of an Indian wigwam," the chieftain responded.

"Wa-al, if you are able to take my scalp, it don't make a bit of difference to me what you do with it, but though you kinder talk as if you thought this hyar thing was all through except the shouting, yet I reckon that you ain't got near so sure a thing as you think for, nohow," Injun Pete affirmed.

"I will see that both of you have a fair show," the soldier remarked. "And you can get to work as soon as you like!"

"I am ready, and the quicker the chief sails in the better I will like it!" the old mountain-man exclaimed.

"Let Longlegs step forth and the White Owl's knife will drink his blood!" the Indian chieftain declared, with fierce emphasis.

Then the two laid aside all their weapons but their knives, and with the glittering steels firmly clutched in their hands, confronted each other.

There was a great contrast between the short-legged, thick-set Indian and the tall, gaunt, angular trapper, and at the first glance it would seem as if the red-skin enjoyed a decided advantage, but as the two circled around each other, eagerly seeking an opening for an attack, a good judge well versed in athletics would soon have come to the conclusion that the old mountain-man far out-classed his opponent.

He was lighter on his feet, and far more nimble than the Apache chief, had a longer reach, and handled his knife, too, in a manner which plainly indicated that he was a master of the weapon.

The spectators had formed a circle around the pair, and all of them were eagerly watching the contest.

For fully three minutes the opponents maneuvered, each one seeking to gain an advantage over the other, and then Injun Pete made a sudden spring at the White Owl.

The blades of the murderous-looking knives clashed as the Indian parried the stroke aimed at his throat.

It was but a feint, though—a move designed to throw the red-skin off his guard—and it succeeded, too, for as the White Owl threw up his arm to ward off the blow, the old mountain-man with marvelous quickness, changed the direction of his knife, and the steel, slipping under the blade of the Indian, cut through the gayly adorned buckskin hunting-shirt into the brawny chest of the Apache chief.

The red chieftain uttered a cry of rage as he felt the keen-edged knife cut into his flesh; a cry which sounded more like the howl of a wild beast than the utterance of a human, and then he literally hurled himself upon his antagonist,

anxious to compass the death of the white man, even at the sacrifice of his own life.

But as the old mountain-man was an expert knife-fighter, he was prepared for just such a movement.

He warded off the knife-thrust with his left arm, receiving only a slight flesh wound, and at the same moment he sunk the blade of his own knife deep in the breast of his red opponent.

The Apache chief gave a gasp, attempted to again strike the white man, but the blow fell short, and then pitched forward on his face.

The fight was ended, and Injun Pete had won an easy victory.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE MAJOR EXPLAINS.

BLANK looks of dismay appeared on the faces of the Indians as they witnessed the downfall of their chieftain, and had it not been for the fact that they were outnumbered by the soldiers there is little doubt the red-skins would have attempted to revenge the defeat of their great chief.

Although the White Owl was pretty badly wounded, yet he had a chance for his life if proper attention was given, and as it happened the "medicine-man" of the tribe was in the party.

This savage leech bound up the wounds of the Apache chieftain, then a rude litter was constructed, the conquered warrior placed upon it and the Indians departed.

While this was going on Injun Pete and Joe Phenix—the pair had withdrawn to one side—had an opportunity for a brief conversation.

"Thar, I feel a deal sight better!" the old mountain-man exclaimed. "I have had it in for this 'tarnel 'Pache chief for nigh to twenty years, but this is the furst chance that I have ever got at him."

"You had very little trouble in disposing of him," the detective observed.

"Wa-al, it did not worry me much for a fact!" Injun Pete declared with a grin.

"And I made a right smart guess how the thing would turn out, too, the moment the red imp said that knives would suit him. I am an old hand at the knife business, and I reckon thar ain't many men in this hyer Western country who kin handle a we'pon of that kind better than I kin, and so when the red buck said knives I reckoned I had got him whar his ha'r was short."

"You see, pard, when it comes to real down-right business, thar ain't many of these red bucks who kin hold thar own with a tough old mountain-man."

"That would certainly seem to be the truth from the way in which you laid out this red warrior."

"Oh, it is a fact!" Injun Pete declared.

"Thar ain't any two ways about it. I never knew one on the red-skins to be able to git the best of a good fair, average white man, although they are allers doing a heap of blowing."

"Will not this affair interfere with our plans?" Joe Phenix asked, thoughtfully.

"I reckon it will, pard," the scout replied with a solemn shake of the head.

"It was a mighty lucky thing for us that the sodgers come as they did," he continued. "For thar ain't no doubt that we were in an awful hole, and I reckon we would have had a tough time to git out, and unless some accident of this kind happened, it is 'bout as sure as anything kin be that we couldn't have crawled out of the scrape, nohow!"

"We kin tell the major a cock and bull story 'bout prospecting up in this region," Injun Pete went on. "And thar's no reason why he won't swaller it for the truth."

"It wouldn't do to let him know that we was arter the Lost Mine 'cos he has had a touch of that fever himself."

"Is that true?"

"Oh, yes; he heard the yarn when he came out to this country, and as, like 't out all the sodgers that I ever run across, he was allers short of money, he thought it would be a big thing for him if he could strike the Lost Mine."

"He got me to go into cahoots with him, but I wasn't lucky enuff to strike anything. I know how he feels 'bout the thing though, and it will not do to let him know what we are arter."

"Yes, I believe you are right," Joe Phenix remarked, after deliberating over the matter for a few moments. "It would not be wise to allow him to know anything about the quest we are on."

"Nary time!" the old mountain-man declared, emphatically.

"It is a mighty funny thing," Injun Pete added, abruptly, "but I am beginning to git the idee into my head that the men who try fer to diskiver this hyer Lost Mine are bound to meet with a heap of ill-luck."

"Do you think so?" Joe Phenix asked, somewhat astonished by this declaration.

"You bet!" Injun Pete responded in his terse and emphatic way.

"If you were as well posted 'bout this hyer Lost Mine as I am I reckon you would git the same notion into your head too. From the time

of the first diskivery all of the men who have been arter the lead have had more or less bad luck."

"Well, now that I come to think the matter over, I don't know but what you are right," the detective remarked, in a reflective way.

"Of course I am not anywhere near as well posted about the Lost Mine as you are, but from what I do know, it certainly seems to bear out your idea."

"Not a mite of a doubt 'bout it!" the old mountain-man declared, in an extremely positive way.

"Right from the beginning all the men who have been arter this hyer mine have had to fight a heap of bad luck."

"Take this leetle speculation of ours for instance."

"Things were going on swimmingly until these 'tarnel red-skins struck in on our trail."

"That is true, and then trouble came thick and fast."

"Sure as you're born!" Injun Pete declared.

"And we ain't through with the thing yet, for, owing to this red-skin business, we will have to give up our hunt for a while," the old scout continued.

"I didn't say much 'bout that bit of lead that the cuss pumped into me, but the darned thing is beginning to pain me now, and I reckon that if I don't have it attended to pretty soon I will have trouble."

"And you also got a slash on the arm from the knife of this White Owl," Joe Phenix observed.

"Oh, that is only a scratch," the other replied. "I don't count that. I am such a darned tough old cuss, that a leetle thing of that sort, that I kin take care of myself, don't worry me at all; but when it comes to a bit of lead, rustling round in a man's body, I reckon the quicker it is h'isted out the better."

"Yes, I agree with you in regard to that. It is not well to neglect such a matter."

"That is my idee, so I think I had better get back to Crazy Camp as soon as I kin, and let the sawbones thar go for this bit of lead."

"Undoubtedly in such a case any delay would be dangerous."

"Then, arter I am fixed up all right, we kin try the thing on ag'in."

"The chances are big that arter this Injun trouble the red bucks would do their best to make it hot for us, and it would be wise to give time for the thing to blow over," the old mountain-man observed, shrewdly.

"Oh, yes, the red-skins will be apt to seek revenge."

"Not a doubt of it! They are a pesky lot of varmints, these 'Paches, and they will try to git squar' with me for having laid out their big chief. But when they find that I have gone back out of the 'Pache-land they will be certain to think I am scared and they will not be apt to reckon I will try the thing ag'in."

The conversation at this point was interrupted by the departure of the Indians, and as they filed away the major came up to the two pards.

"I must congratulate you, Indian Pete!" the soldier exclaimed in his bluff, hearty way. "I don't remember to have ever seen a knife handled with more skill; the red buck stood no chance at all, and yet the White Owl is considered to be one of the greatest warriors in the Apache nation."

"You can't allers tell by that, major," the old scout remarked in his shrewd way. "Thar's a heap of men in this world who git a big reputation when they ain't entitled to it."

"The White Owl is a good war chief—as good a fighter, I reckon, as there is in the tribe, but when it comes to handling a knife he ain't thar when put along side of a man who knows how to do the trick."

"But I say, major, me and my pard are much obliged to you for coming up as you did," the old mountain-man continued.

"I reckon we two were in 'bout as tight a place as we could git, and the durned red niggers would have socked it to us as hot as they knowed how, if you hadn't come along as you did."

"I was glad to be able to pull you out of

the hole!" the major responded. "And besides the fact that I was doing you a service, I am always glad to get a chance to put a flea in the ear of any of these red-skins, the White Owl in particular, for he has carried matters with a high hand for a good many years, and although in the last war he was fairly whipped out of his boots, yet he struts around with as much pomp and dignity as though he had never known what it was to be thrashed to a standstill, and been compelled to beg for mercy."

"I reckon he is the biggest rascal of the lot," Injun Pete remarked. "And I tell you, major, I wasn't sorry for to be able to git a chance at him. I allers felt satisfied that I was good for him if I got any kind of a fair show and things turned out 'bout as I reckoned they would."

"By the way, it isn't me that you have to thank for this rescue," the major observed.

The pards looked surprised at this avowal.

"How do you make that out?" Injun Pete questioned.

"I and my boys came in the nick of time, of course, but we would not have been here, for we wouldn't have known anything about your peril if it had not been for a peculiar sort of a chap who seemed to be a little weak in the upper story," the soldier explained.

"The galoot who calls himself Jocrisse, the Juggler!" the old mountain-man exclaimed.

"Yes, that is the name he gave," the major replied.

"I was on my way with this detachment to Crazy Camp, as I have been ordered to establish a post there for the express purpose of keeping White Owl and his braves in check, when this odd individual made his appearance and informed me that you and your pard had been taken prisoners by the Apaches."

"Wa-al, now, I owe that galoot something, and I never suspicioned it, either!" Injun Pete declared.

"You certainly do, for I hadn't any idea that there were either white men or Indians in the neighborhood," the major affirmed.

"This fellow was posted, though, and after telling the story of your peril, he suggested that I ought to proceed immediately to the rescue, and as soon as I told him I would be glad to go, he volunteered as guide, and led us along with such caution that we were able to surprise the red-skins."

"It was at his suggestion that we dismounted from our horses and proceeded on foot, so as to be certain to take the Indians unawares."

"The dodge was a cute one, and though that poor galoot is a leetle cracked in the upper story, yet he is awful sharp 'bout some things," the scout commented.

"You are well out of the scrape, and you may give the greater part of your thanks to your lunatic friend, too," the soldier remarked.

"I heered a preacher-man talk onc't 'bout casting your bread upon the waters, and arter many days it would come back to you," the old mountain-man observed. "And I'm blamed if thar ain't a good deal in it, too. I went out of my way onc't to do that poor galoot a service, and this hyer thing is the result."

"A pretty good illustration!" the major declared.

"By the way, are you on a prospecting tour?" he asked.

"That is our little biz!" Injun Pete replied.

"Struck anything yet?" the soldier asked.

"Nary strike, and as I got a bit of lead in me in the skirmish I had with these reds, I reckon I will put for Crazy Camp, and let the sawbones attend to it."

The major said he would be glad of the company of the pards, and so the two accompanied the troopers.

Again the attempt to reach the Lost Mine had failed.

Was there indeed a spell protecting the treasure?

CHAPTER XXIII.

A NEW SCHEME.

IN due time the party arrived at Crazy Camp, and the old mountain-man sought the assistance of the sawbones, as he termed Doc Merriwether.

Although this individual would not have ranked high as a medical practitioner in an old and thickly settled community, for his knowledge in that line was not great, yet he had had so much experience with gunshot wounds since he had hung out his shingle as doctor in the mining region, that he could attend to such matters in a very creditable way.

The doctor soon located the bullet, and had little difficulty in extracting it.

"Wa-al, now, Doc, you had better believe that I am mighty glad to see this 'ar' bit of lead!" the old mountain-man exclaimed, as Merriwether held up the bullet.

The scout had borne the pain of the operation with Spartan-like firmness, never moving a muscle as the doctor probed for the bullet, although the operation was an extremely painful one.

"The bullet would undoubtedly have given you a deal of trouble if it had not been extracted promptly," the medical man observed.

"I would a heap sight rather have it in my hand than in my body!" Injun Pete declared, with a grin.

Then the mountain-man paid the doctor, and he departed.

"You see, pard, I wasn't wrong 'bout this hyer thing," the old mountain-man observed, after Merriwether had left.

"I knew from the feel of the thing that the darned leaden pill would trouble me if I didn't git it out, and that was why I was anxious to git the sawbones to attend to it as soon as I could."

"In a week though I will be all right, and we kin try our luck up in the mountains ag'in."

"I hope our second attempt will be more successful than the first," the detective observed.

"Wa-al, I dunno," the old mountain man responded with a dubious shake of the head.

"Thar's a yarn going 'round 'bout this hyer Lost Mine that thar ain't no luck 'bout it, and, r'ally when you come to consider that the lead has been found and lost a dozen times or more since the old Injun days, and nobody has succeeded in making much of anything out of it, it looks as if thar might be some truth in the notion."

"Well, I am not one of the kind of men who scoffs at the idea that luck has anything to do with a man's successes or failures, for I have seen too many instances where there was no doubt that luck, and luck alone, made or unmade the man, and so I am not prepared to say that this Lost Mine is not guarded by a sort of spell which brings bad luck to any one who attempts to win the treasure, but for all that I am going to try my best to get at the gold."

"Oh, I am with you!" the old mountain-man exclaimed.

"Don't you make any mistake 'bout that! If I knew the place was guarded by a dozen devils you kin bet high that I would make a try for the treasure."

"You see, I have a mighty big confidence in the goodness of my 'medicine,' as a red buck would say," the scout continued. "And I reckon that if any man can git the gold I kin, and until I make a complete slump-up in the affair I won't give the notion up."

Joe Phenix remarked that he thought this was the right way to look at the matter, and so the pards decided that as soon as the old scout's wound healed a little so that there would not be any danger of his taking cold in it, another attempt would be made to locate the Lost Mine.

At the time this conversation was going on between the two, there was a trio in the den of Handsome Harry also busy in discussing the subject.

There was the boss gambler, Handsome Harry himself, his pal, Tim Higgins, and the New York crook, Dick Delmayne.

The brows of the three were dark and their faces wore an anxious look.

They were better posted in regard to the affair than the pards, for they knew how it was that the two half-breeds came to take the notion into their heads to follow on the trail of the pair.

Shrewd as were the old scout and the experienced man-hunter yet neither one suspected that the half-breeds had been hired to follow on their trail. It was their idea that

the pair had accidentally discovered their presence in the Indian country, and natural devilry had caused the two to make the move which had resulted so disastrously to them.

"This is a bad business," Handsome Harry remarked with an ominous shake of the head.

He had just related the particulars which he had learned regarding the trip which the detective and the old mountain-man had made to the Indian country.

Although the pair would liked to have kept the matter quiet yet under the peculiar circumstances it was not possible.

The soldiers, being acquainted with the facts, took great pleasure in describing to the miners how Injun Pete and his pard had whipped the two half-breeds, and then the old mountain-man had capped the climax by laying out the great Apache chief, White Owl, in a knife fight.

"It is apparent from this little adventure that the job which we have taken upon ourselves is going to be an extremely difficult one," Dick Delmayne remarked, thoughtfully.

"Oh, yes, neither one of the two is a slouch and the man who gets ahead of either the detective or Injun Pete will have to get up mighty early in the morning!" Tim Higgins averred.

"The game is up as far as the half-breeds are concerned!" the gambler declared. "We can't expect anything from them now."

"That is a fact," the New Yorker asserted. "The jig is up in that quarter and we must try something else."

"When I went into this thing it was my idea that it would not be a very difficult matter to get hold of the treasure of the mine," Handsome Harry observed, reflectively. "But I am beginning to think I made a mistake about that."

"Oh, yes, the game is going to be an extremely difficult one," Dick Delmayne assented with a grim shake of the head.

"You can jest bet all you are worth on that!" Tim Higgins cried.

"In the first place we have to contend with a pair of extra good men," the gambler remarked. "They are just hot after the mine, and from the way they are proceeding it is evident that they mean business. They are on the track and they will not be hustled off of it without making the toughest kind of a fight."

"And this old mountain-man is a terror too, I tell you!" Tim Higgins declared.

"Then there is another point about the affair that I don't like the looks of at all," Dick Delmayne observed. "And that is the mine is evidently right up in the heart of the Indian country, and the chances are big that any attempt to work the mine would be sure to excite the anger of the Apaches and then there would be trouble."

"No doubt about that," Handsome Harry replied.

"But that doesn't worry me much for I know of a way to get around it."

"How can you do it?" the New Yorker asked, surprised at the assertion.

"We will locate the mine and go through the proper forms according to mining laws, and after we have secured the claim, if it is one-tenth as rich as it is reported to be, we can form a company and sell out at a big figure, then the other fellows can do the Indian-fighting."

"Ah, yes, I see, and I must say that the idea is a mighty good one!" Dick Delmayne declared.

"Oh, that will not be any difficulty in working the trick if the property is worth anything," Tim Higgins asserted. "As far as I can see the only trouble will be to get at the mine. In the first place these two men are in the way and then as the lead is up in the Injun country we will have to take a strong party when we go to locate the mine or else the reds will be apt to wipe us out, for although the Paches are supposed to be whipped right into a humble state of mind, yet it is dollars to cents that if they caught a small party of white men up in their country the red bucks would be mighty apt to go for them."

"Yes, that is true," the gambler assented. "But I didn't borrow much trouble on that score, for now that the soldiers have arrived

in the neighborhood, it will be apt to put the red-skins on their good behavior."

"These two men are the ones we must look after!" Dick Delmayne declared. "And in my opinion we will not be able to do anything until we get them out of the way."

"I agree with you there!" Handsome Harry affirmed.

"You have struck it plumb-center this time, and no mistake!" Tim Higgins exclaimed.

"And so the question before the meeting is, how can we dispose of this troublesome pair?" the gambler asked.

"It is not an easy one to answer!" Dick Delmayne replied, with a dubious shake of the head.

"We have made two trials, and slipped up both times," Tim Higgins observed.

"Well, here is a point in the matter that we have not taken into account," Handsome Harry remarked.

"Explain!" cried Dick Delmayne.

"We have been setting traps to catch both the stranger and the old mountain-man," the gambler said, in a thoughtful way.

"Yes, that is true," the New Yorker assented.

"Hav'n't we made a mistake in working the game that way?" Handsome Harry asked.

"Well, I don't exactly see how you can figure that out," Dick Delmayne observed.

"I must say that it kinder bothers me, too," Tim Higgins chimed in.

"Well, I have been thinking over the matter, and I have come to the conclusion that we ought not to worry ourselves about the old scout at all," the gambler declared. "The other man is our mutton, it seems to me. I don't think there is a doubt that he is a New York detective in disguise, and his sole business here is to get hold of the treasure contained in the Lost Mine."

"I think you are right about that," Dick Delmayne affirmed.

"Oh, yes, that is so!" Tim Higgins declared.

"And it is this detective who has a clew to the mine, and not Injun Pete, whom the New Yorker has merely hired to guide him," Handsome Harry continued.

The others nodded to show they were satisfied that this statement was correct.

"Therefore it follows that the stranger is the man whom we must attack, for if we settle him, Injun Pete will drop right out of the affair."

"You are right!" Dick Delmayne declared. "And we have made a mistake in going for the old scout."

"You would be safe in betting all you are worth on that!" Tim Higgins exclaimed, with the air of an oracle.

"I reckon that I haven't made any mistake about the matter," Handsome Harry observed, with a confident air.

"We don't want to trouble ourselves about Injun Pete at all," the gambler continued. "Just let him alone, and do our level best to settle the hash of the other fellow."

"That is the game, and it will be a deuced sight easier to work than the one we have been trying to play," the New Yorker remarked.

"You bet!" exclaimed Tim Higgins. "This hyer old scout is the toughest kind of a rooster, and the man who succeeds in climbing him, has got to be the biggest kind of a chief."

"Oh, there is no doubt that of the two men Injun Pete is by far the best," Handsome Harry asserted. "And by making up our minds to let the old scout alone in the future, and devoting all our efforts to putting this stranger in a hole, we just double our chances in the game."

"I think you are right," Dick Delmayne assented.

"Sart'in! correct, every time!" Tim Higgins declared.

"Well, now that point is settled, the next thing is to decide how we will proceed to get at this bloodhound," the gambler remarked.

"That is not an easy matter to arrange," the New Yorker said, with a doubtful shake of the head.

"No, that it ain't, for this hyer man is a good one!" Tim Higgins exclaimed. "He is a big feller, and mighty quick on his pins,

handy with his fists, too, for the lick he gave Jack Smithers was about as pretty a one as I ever saw struck, and I have seen some rattling good fights in my time, too."

"Oh, he is a good man and we must not make the mistake of underrating him," the gambler remarked. "More games slip up because the man who is working them doesn't give his opponent credit for being anywhere near as good as he is, and we must not make any mistake of that kind, you know."

"Oh, no!" exclaimed the others, in a breath.

"And now the question comes up: how can we work the trick?" Handsome Harry asked.

"We have tried two dodges and neither one of them worked," he continued. "Now I am going to propose a new way."

"We three are the men who are interested in this game, and as we have not had good luck in getting other men to do the work, I propose we take the job into our own hands."

"We three will draw lots to see who will tackle the game, and the man who gets the chance must receive a good fat sum for his trouble after we succeed in getting possession of the mine."

The others thought this was a fair proposition, and expressed themselves to that effect.

"I will fix three straws, and the man who draws the shortest gets the job," the gambler said.

"And it is my opinion, too," he continued, "that the man who works the game ought to get about a thousand dollars for his trouble."

The others remarked that they thought this was about the fair thing.

Then Handsome Harry prepared the straws and the drawing took place.

The short straw fell to Tim Higgins, and it was evident from the expression upon his face that he did not at all relish the task.

"Well, Tim, you are elected!" Handsome Harry exclaimed. "And you stand a chance to pocket a thousand ducats if you only manage the affair in the proper way."

"I ain't a hankering much arter the thing, I can tell you now," Tim Higgins replied with a grimace.

"I ain't no slouch, and nobody ever said I was, but I kin tell you I wouldn't be a bit sorry if either one of you fellers had the chance to collar the thousand ducats instead of me."

"Oh, I reckon neither Delmayne or I are anxious to take the job off your hands," the gambler remarked with a cynical smile.

"You have the first chance at the thousand, and if you cannot make the raffle then Delmayne comes in, and I after him, for my straw was the longest of the three."

"Tim will do the job up brown!" Dick Delmayne exclaimed in a confident way. "I know Higgins of old and when he has a game of this kind on hand he goes at it in such a careful methodical way that he seldom fails to pull off the trick."

"I allers make it a pint to do the best I kin, and I am one of the kind of galoots who never take any more chances than they kin help," the ruffian observed slowly.

"This hyer game is going to be an extra difficult one 'cos this detective is an extra good man, and I am a leetle puzzled as to how I will git at him."

"Let me see!" Handsome Harry said, musingly. "How would it do, Tim, for you to lay in wait for him in the entry of the hotel? You can take a room there for a few nights and post yourself in regard to his comings and goings—watch your opportunity and lay him out with a billy?"

"If you are careful how you manage the affair you ought to be able to work it in that way."

Higgins assented to this, and so the game was arranged.

The ruffian pretended to be confident, but it was plain that he would not undertake the work if it was possible for him to get out of it.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE SPY IS SURPRISED.

THE more that Tim Higgins meditated upon the scheme which he had undertaken the

more difficult the job appeared to be, and the greater became his perplexity.

He did not say anything to his companions in regard to the matter, for he had an idea that if he spoke of the obstacles which were in the way they would believe he was afraid of the task, and as he posed as a "big chief" he did not want any one to think he dreaded so simple an undertaking as getting rid of a single man.

But he did though.

Ha had seen enough of Joe Phenix during his brief sojourn in New York to understand that the detective was no slouch, to use the westernism.

And that this mysterious stranger, who called himself John Randolph, was the famous eastern bloodhound he felt quite certain, although his disguise was so perfect as to defy recognition.

If the stranger was the detective it would not be an easy matter for Higgins to carry out the scheme which he had formed, for the detective having come in contact with him in New York would be certain to recognize him if he took up his quarters in the hotel, and the moment the bloodhound "located" him he would be sure to suspect that danger threatened and so would be on his guard.

"I can't afford to take any chances in this matter," the ruffian muttered as he meditated over the situation.

"If the detective gets onto me he will be sart'in to come to the conclusion that it is either his life or mine, and if I don't finish him he will be pretty apt to finish me, so I must go in to make a sure thing of it."

And having arrived at this conclusion Higgins racked his brains to think of some plan by means of which he could get at the detective without exposing himself.

Finally, after a vast amount of deliberation, he formed a scheme which he thought would compass the death of this dangerous foe without exposing himself.

From one of the servants of the hotel he ascertained the location of the room occupied by the supposed detective and the old mountain-man.

It was to the rear of the building and on the eastern side.

The plan which Higgins had formed was extremely simple.

The nearest building to the hotel on the eastern side was about a hundred feet away—a small store which usually closed up at ten o'clock.

By taking a position in the rear of this store, where he would be completely sheltered from the notice of anybody going along the street, he could command a view of the window, and as he was a pretty fair rifle-shot his idea was to lay in wait until he saw the detective, when he went to his room to go to bed, and then put a ball into him.

The scheme seemed to be a feasible one.

The men when they went to rest took a candle with them, and if the detective came near the window he would afford a fine target.

That the detective was likely to come to the window seemed highly probable, and acting on this idea Higgins provided himself with a rifle and took a position behind the store.

He was careful to have a horse tethered near at hand so as to be able to escape after the deed was done.

Really it appeared as if the ruffian had hit upon a pretty sure thing, but the scheme did not work as Higgins expected.

When the ruffian placed himself in ambush, the window of the room was dark, showing that the men had not yet entered the apartment, but after he had waited for about half an hour his eyes were gratified by the sight of a light.

Higgins raised the hammer of his rifle and got all ready to send the deadly ball on its fatal mission.

But, to use the old saying, the would-be assassin had "reckoned without the host," for neither the detective nor the old mountain-man came near the window, or at any rate not until the light was extinguished.

There wasn't any curtain to the window—nothing to shield the occupants of the room from sight, and if either of the pards had come near the window the watcher would certainly have seen them.

For four nights Higgins kept diligent watch, but not the slightest view of either

of the men did he get, and then he gave the scheme up in disgust.

"I might have known better than to think it would work!" he exclaimed, angry with himself at wasting his time upon a fruitless quest.

"Neither one of these two galoots are fools; the detective in particular is as smart as they make 'em, and he knows mighty well, too, that thar are men in this hyer camp who are jest ripe for to git a crack at him, and he ain't a-going to gi'n 'em a chance if he knows it."

"He is fly enuff to reckon that somebody might be laying for him with a rifle, and he ain't going to give anybody a chance to play him."

Then a new idea came to the ruffian.

Why should he not take a leaf out of the detective's book—follow his example and assume a disguise?

Then he would be able to take up his quarters in the hotel, and wait for a favorable opportunity to strike a deadly blow at the man whose life he sought.

This idea seemed to be a capital one to him, and the longer he reflected upon the matter the more he became convinced that it was the best thing he could do.

He consulted his associates in regard to the matter, explaining to them that he had tried for four nights to get a shot at the detective.

Handsome Harry remarked that he could have told him at the beginning that no such game could be worked, but both he and the New Yorker believed that if he Higgins, took a room at the hotel he might be able to do something.

Encouraged by this assurance the ruffian proceeded to change his personal appearance so that the detective would not be able to recognize him.

He shaved off his bushy whiskers and cropped his hair, then stained his face to a dark shade as though he had been exposed to the wind and sun for a long time, therefore when he made his appearance in the hotel and announced to Fat Tom Blackford, the landlord of the Washington House, that he was a prospector just in from the mountains, that worthy, although he was well-acquainted with Higgins, had no suspicion that he had ever seen him before.

It was Higgins's game not to attract attention to himself, so when the landlord inquired what luck he had had, he replied he hadn't struck anything that amounted to anything, and he had merely come to Crazy Camp to meet a pard who was to join him there in anticipation of another trip.

A mining-camp is like a little country town: strangers are always regarded with a deal of curiosity until all the particulars in regard to them are ascertained.

By his plain, straight-forward tale the disguised ruffian disarmed suspicion and so was able to play the spy upon the man whose life he sought.

The room to which he had been assigned was at the other end of the hall from the one occupied by the detective and Injun Pete, and this did not suit the spy at all, for the location of the room was such that it was not possible for him to keep a good watch upon the pards.

Upon examination he discovered that there was a vacant room right opposite to the one occupied by the disguised detective, and he applied to the landlord to be changed to it, stating that the man who slept in the room next to his present one was such a tremendous snorer that he could not sleep.

It was true enough that the man did a snorer as to wake the echoes of the night, but Higgins was not the kind of fellow to be worried by such a trifle as this.

The excuse did well enough though, and the landlord gave him the other room.

"Now, then, my bold detective, if I don't catch you napping my name ain't Tim Higgins!" the ruffian exclaimed in glee after he was put in possession of the room.

But, as the Scotch poet wisely remarks: in this uncertain world the best laid plans of mice and men often fail, and in the present instance, although the ruffian flattered himself that everything was progressing favorably, yet he was destined to be disagreeably disappointed in regard to this anticipation.

It was on the second night he occupied the

room that he was abruptly made acquainted with the fact that spying was a game that two could play at.

He had retired to his room early, so as to be in readiness to keep a watch on his men.

With a gimlet he had bored some holes in the door, so as to be able to keep his eyes upon his neighbors without their suspecting that aught was amiss.

On both of these two nights that Higgins had watched the pards, they had not only come up stairs together, but a couple of the other lodgers in the hotel had accompanied them, so that it was not possible for the concealed ruffian to attack his man.

It was his game, of course, to commit the deed in such a way that the guilt could not be brought home to him.

The act must be committed secretly, so he would have an opportunity to escape after the deed was done, and the victim must be alone when the shot was fired.

The plan that Higgins had formed was simple enough.

He was going to watch for an opportunity when the disguised detective should come to his room alone.

Then, as he was entering the apartment, Higgins would open the door of his room and shoot the other in the back.

If the deed was committed in this way, the chances were good that the crime could not be brought home to him.

It was his intention, after firing the shot, to close the door, and if the wound did not produce immediate death, it would not be possible for the victim to tell who it was that did the deed.

He would not see the assassin, and if he was able to talk, all he could say was that some one shot him in the back."

But, as we have stated, the ruffian had no opportunity to attack the disguised detective, and on this particular night of which we write, he went to bed in an extremely bad humor.

Higgins had provided himself with a flask of whisky, and in disgust at not being able to carry out his plans, had helped himself to it in an extremely liberal manner, the result being that his brains were pretty well muddled when he went to bed.

He slept like a log until the small hours of the morning, when he was suddenly roused by rude hands laid upon him.

CHAPTER XXV.

ON THE RACK.

THE ruffian awoke with a start, but his brains were still confused by the liquor which he had drank, as he had not slept a sufficient time to get rid of the effects of the potent fluid.

Higgins was a hard drinker—a man who could dispose of a good deal of liquor without being affected by it, but as on this occasion he had taken nearly a pint of whisky—regular frontier tanglefoot—it was not strange that his brain should become muddled.

At first he thought he was the victim of a bad dream, as it was a common experience for him to be troubled by visions of such a nature as to cause him to feel the torments of the lost souls doomed to everlasting fires, from which he would wake trembling in every limb, and covered with a cold perspiration.

In a moment or two, though, he discovered that it was no dream this time which had disturbed his slumbers.

Mortal foes had attacked him and not the visionary creations of his brains.

A gag had been thrust into his mouth, so that it was not possible for him to cry out for assistance, and as he rose to a sitting posture with the idea of attempting to fight his unknown assailants, a lariat was deftly cast around him which pinioned his arms to his sides and at the same moment another lariat was passed around his ankles and quickly made fast so that he was rendered completely helpless.

It did not take the ruffian long to realize that he was entrapped and he struggled with all his strength to free himself from the bonds which bound him, but the stout lariats, made to resist the force of a wild horse, were not to be broken by the power of human muscles and so all of the efforts of Higgins were in vain.

His captors proceeded in a business-like way, and from the manner in which they went to work it was plain that all the details of the affair had been carefully arranged in advance.

After the ruffian was secured—trussed like a turkey ready for roasting, in fact—the intruders—there were two of them—took Higgins up bodily and carried him out of the room, through the hall, down the stairs, and then out into the open air. There wasn't anything to interfere with this programme, for all the inmates of the house were fast asleep and the door of the hotel was never fastened.

The establishment could not boast of such a luxury as a night clerk, and the door was left unlocked so that any belated lodger would not have any difficulty in getting to his room.

At such an hour as the attackers of Higgins had selected for their work it was not likely that a soul would be stirring in the camp, and so there was little danger that they would be interfered with.

It was as the plotters had anticipated.

The town was as deserted as a graveyard at the midnight hour.

The men had a horse in waiting at the rear of the hotel, and they carried the ruffian to where the beast was tethered, laid him along the back of the animal, binding him in such a way with the lariats as to keep him from falling off.

After this operation was completed to their satisfaction they took up the line of march for the foot-hills.

It did not take them long to get clear of the camp and soon they were hid amid the bushes and stunted trees which grew so thickly in the rough and broken country which surround the town.

On they went, up into the mountains, following a trail so little used that it was with great difficulty it could be distinguished.

The success of the enterprise had been complete.

Higgins had been captured and taken from the hotel and town without a single soul being aware of what had taken place.

A mile from the camp, at the end of the lonely trail, was a small cabin which from its appearance had evidently been deserted.

The door was off its hinges and the shutter, which had guarded the window, was gone: in the roof were great cracks through which streamed the mild light of the full moon now riding high in the heavens.

Into the cabin the two carried their helpless burden and deposited it in a corner, where the full light of the moon came, rendering it almost as light as by day.

Then the pair searched the prisoner and removed his weapons.

After having drawn his teeth as it were, the blanket which had been cast over Higgins's head after the gag had been placed in his mouth, was removed and then the gag itself, thus giving him liberty of speech and sight.

Indignantly the ruffian glared upon his captors.

From the beginning of the attack up to the time of the removal of the blanket his mind had been in a whirl, for he had been completely at a loss to account for the attack.

And now that he was permitted to look upon the men who had performed the operation so neatly, although he recognized them immediately, yet he could not comprehend why he should have been thus assaulted.

It was the stranger who called himself John Randolph, and his pard, Injun Pete, the old mountain-man, that had done the work.

A few moments Higgins stared at the two in silence and then, in an angry way he cried:

"What in blazes do you mean by coming any game of this kind on me?"

"I suppose you fully comprehend what has happened?" the disguised detective asked in a cool, business-like way.

"Well, I reckon I do—I ain't no fool, no way you kin fix it!" the ruffian replied in a savage manner.

"Then you understand that you are in a tight place—that you are fully in our power and completely helpless?"

Higgins did not feel pleased with this statement, for it seemed to suggest that there was trouble ahead, but he put on as bold a

front as possible, shook his head in an angry, defiant way and exclaimed:

"Mebbe you fellers think that you are smart in playing a trick of this kind on me, but if I don't git squar' with you for it some day then I ain't the man I think I am!"

"Well, as far as that goes it has always been my motto to look out for to-day and let to-morrow take care of itself," the other remarked.

"But to return to our muttons; my partner here and myself have taken considerable trouble in arranging this little business, and I presume you are wondering why we have put up this job on you."

"That is a fact," Higgins admitted in a sullen way. "I don't see that either one of you two had any call to interfere with me. I never have done nothing to you as I knows on."

"It is not what you *have* done—it is what you are *going* to do," the disguised detective observed in a meaning way.

"Why should you think that I am going to trouble myself about you, or your pard?" the ruffian exclaimed, decidedly ill at ease.

"I don't know either one of you, and I reckon I ain't the kind of man to go 'round bothering my head about strangers."

"Oh, come! you know that isn't true!" Joe Phenix declared, in his judicial way.

"Not true?"

"No, it isn't!"

"But it is!" Higgins persisted. "I am a stranger in this hyer camp—only jest come, and how kin you make out that I know you, or anybody else in the town, either, for that matter?"

"This little game will not work!" the disguised detective announced.

"W'ot little game?" growled the ruffian.

"No doubt you think your disguise is so perfect that it cannot be penetrated, but although you have got yourself up remarkably well, yet as it is a part of my business to study such riddles, you did not succeed in deceiving me."

"I knew you the moment I set eyes on you, and though I had flattered myself that my get-up was perfection itself, yet when you made your appearance in the hotel, and commenced to pay attention to me, I immediately came to the conclusion that despite the pains I had taken, I had not succeeded in deceiving you."

These words opened Higgins's eyes, but as a bluff game was what he prided himself upon, he would not "acknowledge the corn."

"I don't know what in thunder you are talking about!" he exclaimed.

"I never set eyes on you before! I am right sart'in on that point, and I don't understand what you mean!"

"Oh, come now, friend Higgins, this sort of thing will not do!" the disguised detective rejoined.

"It will not do you any good to pretend to be ignorant, for I know better."

"You know who I am as well as I do myself, and the moment I saw that you had taken up your quarters in the hotel, and had your eyes on me, I comprehended that the game was up as far as my disguise was concerned."

"Your name is Timothy Higgins, and you are the man whom I arrested in New York, for I am the detective, Joe Phenix."

"I did not succeed in getting you dead to rights—either you or your companion, Dick Delmayne—and after you procured your release, I set my spies on your track; soon the report was brought to me that you and this confidence king had disappeared, then I was not long in suspecting that the pair of you had proceeded to the West with the design of helping yourself to the treasure, the clew to the hiding-place of which was in the copper casket, and as I had not succeeded in blocking your game in as satisfactory a manner as I could wish in the East, I made up my mind to transfer the field of battle to the West, and so here I am."

"All this hyer talk is Greek to me!" Higgins declared, stoutly.

"What is the use of talking in that way?" Joe Phenix asked.

"Just at this particular moment I have got the best of the struggle, and you might as well make a clean breast of it."

"Oho! that is your game, is it?" the ruf-

fian exclaimed, as though a sudden light had broken in upon him.

"You have gone to all this trouble in git-ting me into a tight place so as to git me to peach, eh?"

"That is about the idea!" Joe Phenix as-sented.

"I don't doubt that you think you are a mighty smart man, but I reckon you will not work this game as you reckon you kin."

"Nary thing will you git out of me! Mind you, I don't say I know anything, but if I do, I'm dumb!" the ruffian declared.

CHAPTER XXVI.

AN OLD GAME.

IT was with a great air of bravado that Higgins gave utterance to the declaration.

"You refuse to give me any information then?" the detective said in his quiet way.

"It is jest as I told you—you won't git anything out of me!" the prisoner declared.

"I s'pose you think you have worked a mighty sharp trick on me, but I reckon you won't make much out of it."

"That remains to be seen," Joe Phenix retorted. "There isn't any doubt though that I have got the best of you at present, but just how much advantage I will gain is an open question."

"You see, the moment I recognized you and found you had taken up your quarters at the hotel I made up my mind to watch you, for I suspected that you meant mischief."

"It did not take me long to discover that you had your eyes on me, and then I was certain you intended to play me some trick, for I came to the conclusion that, despite my disguise, you had either recognized me or suspected who I was. It is an old rule of mine to always strike the first blow in an affair of this kind if I can so I immediately set my wits to work to get you into a trap."

"Well, you managed to pull the thing off, but I am willing to bet good money that you won't gain anything by it!" the ruffian exclaimed in a sulky manner.

"I think I can make a pretty good guess as to the way this matter is being worked," Joe Phenix remarked.

"Dick Delmayne is hiding in the town, probably in Handsome Harry's place, for I have a notion that the gambler is in with you two," the detective continued.

The speech took Higgins by surprise, and he had not sufficient command over his features to prevent the man-hunter from seeing that his shot had struck home.

"Oh, you know a heap, of course!" Higgins exclaimed with a sneer. "And what you don't know you think you do; but, as I said afore, I am willing to bet big money that you won't make much."

"You have managed to git me into your power but I will be hanged if I can see what good it is going to do you!"

"I ain't committed no crime, and you ain't going according to law, nohow! What right have you got to take me out of my bed, in the middle of the night, and lug me off? It is a durned outrage, that's what it is, and I will git squar' with you for it, some time!"

"Why, don't you understand?" said the detective, affecting to be surprised. "I am giving you a dose of your own medicine. This is the kind of game which you and your pals would have tried on me, for you saw that I was hot on the trail and, no doubt, were alarmed lest I should discover the Lost Mine."

"Oh, you are talking nonsense now, and I don't know what you are driving at!" the ruffian declared.

"You are not going to make a clean breast of it then?" Joe Phenix asked.

"I'm no squealer!" Higgins retorted in a defiant way.

"I am afraid then that I will have to put the screws on you in a way you will despise," the detective observed in a very quiet way, not in the least threatening.

Higgins stared in amazement.

"Put the screws on me!" he exclaimed, evidently in the dark as to the meaning of the detective.

"Yes, that is what I said."

"I reckon I don't understand," Higgins declared. "What in blazes do you mean by putting the screws on me?"

"Higgins, I presume you know me by re-

putation although you are a Westerner and not well acquainted in the East."

"Oh yes, I got introduced to you in New York," the ruffian replied with a grin. "You tried your best to git me into a hole thar, but you didn't come it."

"I think you will have to admit that I have been more successful in this attempt," Joe Phenix remarked with a meaning smile. "You won't make nothing out of it though," the ruffian retorted.

"Well, as I was about to say, you ought to know me well enough by reputation to understand that I am not the kind of man who would be apt to waste his time in getting up a job of this sort."

"No, I s'pose not," Higgins said, a blank look on his face as though he was in doubt as to the meaning of the other.

"I am aware that this business is all outside of the law," the detective continued. "But then you understand, of course, that this is a region where the law doesn't amount to much, for each man is a law unto himself."

"Now I am anxious to get at the bottom of this matter, and as I feel satisfied that you can tell me, if you want to, all I wish to know, I intend, as I said, to put the screws on you, and so force you to speak."

"I reckon you will have a hard time in making me talk when I have made up my mind that I won't do anything of the kind!" the ruffian declared with a great air of bravado.

"That is just where you have made a mistake, unless you are a far better man than I take you to be," the detective rejoined.

"You will find that I am as good a man as you kin scare up anywhere 'round these hyer diggings!" Higgins exclaimed.

"That remains to be seen. The scheme I am going to try on you is an extremely old one, but as it has usually worked to perfection during a good thousand years, I do not doubt it will succeed all right this time."

The ruffian stared; the speech bothered him.

"What in blazes are you going to do anyway?" he growled.

"Put the screws on you, just as I said," the detective replied.

"I want certain information out of you, and if you do not choose to speak, then you must be *made* to talk."

"By the everlasting hills!" Higgins exclaimed in a fearful rage, "you had better be careful what you do! I am a desperate man, I am, and an ugly customer to handle; and although you may have the best of it now, you can bet your life that my time will come."

"Possibly, according to the old saying that every dog has his day, but the present chance is mine, and I mean to improve it to the fullest extent, and without any regard too for the probability that at some future time you may be able to get back at me."

"If you are wise you won't push me too far!" the ruffian declared with a fearful scowl.

"I fear that according to your notion I am not wise, for I intend to make you give me the information I desire without regard to the consequences."

"Now then, before I proceed to active measures, I will give you a last chance; tell me what I want to know—make a clean breast of this whole affair from beginning to end and I will let up on you."

"Nary time! I'm no sich critter as that! You kin jest go ahead and do your worst—I defy you!" Higgins roared in anger.

"All right! It is your election and not mine, and since you will have it so, blame yourself and not me," Joe Phenix remarked with the air of a judge delivering sentence upon a criminal.

"Now, Pete, you can get to work."

The old mountain-man, who had remained in the back-ground taking no part in the proceedings, being thus called upon, advanced with a grin upon his weather-beaten face.

Higgins scowled at him in his ugliest way. "Injun Pete, I want you to understand that I will hold you to a bloody reckoning if you j'ine in with this galoot ag'in me!" he cried in a fierce outburst of rage.

"You had better save your breath to cool soup!"—the old scout retorted. "And you are a bigger idiot than I thought you was if you think you kin skeer me with either your black looks or your big words."

"I ain't that kind of a hairpin, no way you kin fix it."

"I'll have your heart's blood!" the ruffian roared.

"Oh, no, you won't," the old mountain-man retorted. "Not if this court knows herself, and she thinks she does!"

"I have heered jest sich critters as you are howl afore, and you kin bet your life that I didn't skeer for a cent."

"You are in for a course of sprouts if you don't come right down and eat humble-pie, and if you ain't the biggest kind of a fool, you will spit all you know as quick as you kin."

"Curse you both! you cowardly dogs, you don't dare to give me a chance!" the ruffian raved.

"Higgins, you are not so wise as I took you to be!" the detective replied, contemptuously.

"You went into this game with your eyes open, and now that you have got the worst of the fight, you fall to whining that you did not have a chance. But I hav'n't any time to waste. Go ahead, Pete!"

The old mountain-man proceeded to draw off the boots of the ruffian.

"Hello! stop! What are you 'bout?" Higgins cried, in amazement.

"Going to have a leetle fun with you, that is all," the scout replied, with a grin.

The ruffian did not wear stockings, and when the boots were removed his bare feet appeared.

Then the old mountain-man produced a feather and proceeded to tickle the soles of the ruffian's feet.

First Higgins swore, and vowed to execute all manner of vengeance upon his captors when he should regain his liberty, but soon he changed his tune, for the torture was so fearful that he did not have the nerve to bear it, and at last broke down completely, and agreed to comply with the detective's wishes.

A few minutes more and Joe Phenix was in possession of all the plans of the plotters.

"I will release you," the detective said. "Go to Dick Delmayne, and tell him this town is not big enough to hold both of us!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

A DESPERATE RESOLVE.

DICK DELMAYNE and Handsome Harry sat in the gambler's private room.

It was on the morning in the early part of which the events detailed in our last chapter occurred.

"It is about time for Higgins to make his appearance," the New Yorker remarked as he glanced at the little clock ticking away on the wall.

"Yes, I reckon he will show up pretty soon," the gambler replied. "Higgins never was noted for being an early riser, but he ought to have routed out and got his breakfast by this time."

"I don't suppose he succeeded in doing anything last night or you would have heard something about it by this time," Dick Delmayne observed in a reflective way.

"No, I reckon not, although he calculated that thar might be a chance for him to get a lick at his man, but between you and me and the bed-post, I do not take a great deal of stock in Higgins," the gambler declared with a deprecating shake of the head.

"Well, I don't know much about the man—never even heard of him, in fact, until you sent him to hunt me up in the East, so I am not capable of passing a correct opinion; still from what little I have seen of him I should think he was a pretty good man."

"Ah, yes, for an ordinary job I don't doubt that he would do all right, but this is an extra bit of work, I fancy, that is if this fellow who calls himself John Randolph is the detective, Joe Phenix, and he is anywhere near as good a man as you have described him to be."

"I have not overrated him at all," Dick Delmayne declared. "You can be certain in regard to that."

"He is one of the best men in the detective business, and, really, I think that he is

equal to any other two men in that line that I know of; in fact, I would prefer to cope with a dozen ordinary detectives rather than have Joe Phenix get after me."

"You are posted, of course, and remembering what you have told me about this man is why I am a little doubtful in regard to Higgins being able to do anything," Handsome Harry observed.

"Higgins is no coward, but he isn't a first-class man by any manner of means," the gambler continued. "And if this detective is anywhere near as good a man as you believe, it is my notion that Higgins will not be able to do anything with him."

"He seemed to be pretty confident, though," Dick Delmayne urged.

"That is his style always," Handsome Harry replied. "He is a good deal of a blower, and likes to hear himself talk once in a while. Then, too, I reckon that he ain't got no idea how good a man the detective is, and thinks he can play a winning game just because he isn't able to calculate the chances. Men are making just such mistakes as that all the time, you know."

"Yes, I am aware of that fact, and if you remember, I warned Higgins before he started into this thing, and told him not to make the mistake of holding his man too cheaply."

"Yes, I know you did," the gambler replied. "But then you see Higgins is a kind of a bull-headed fellow, and upon that sort of man warnings are often thrown away."

"I don't hardly think that it was so in this case," Dick Delmayne asserted. "He listened earnestly enough to what I had to say, and seemed to be impressed by it, too."

"That is so!" Handsome Harry exclaimed. "I remember that he said he reckoned he had a hard row to hoe."

"Yes: he came in contact with the detective in New York, and so got a pretty good idea of what kind of a man he was, and from the way Higgins talked I think he understood that his job was no easy one."

"He had an idea that there was a chance he could do something last night," the gambler remarked. "But as I didn't hear anything about it this morning, I reckon he did not succeed in getting at his man."

"If he had made any attack upon the detective you surely would have heard something about it."

"Yes, that was my idea."

The conversation at this point was interrupted by the appearance of the ruffian, who came slouching into the room with a look on his face which plainly indicated that he was very much disgruntled.

"Hello! what is the matter with you?" Handsome Harry exclaimed. "Something has bu'sted, I'll bet a hat!"

"Right you are for ducats!" the ruffian replied as he helped himself to a chair.

"Had a slip up?" Dick Delmayne inquired.

"You bet! and the worst kind of a one too!" Higgins answered.

"How was it—explain!" the gambler cried.

"Boys, all the fat is in the fire!" Higgins declared, shaking his head in a melancholy way.

"Go ahead and let us know all about it!" the New Yorker exclaimed.

"It won't take long for me to do that," the ruffian replied.

"The long and the short of the matter is that while I was doing my durnest to set a trap to ketch this hyer detective he up and fixed things so as to git me so foul that I didn't stand no show to help myself," the ruffian explained, and then he proceeded to relate all that had occurred, giving a faithful account of the proceedings.

"Mebbe you will think hard on me for squealing," Higgins said in conclusion. "But I kin jest tell you, boys, that I reckon neither one on you would have been able to stand the press any better than I did."

"Well, I don't know about that," Handsome Harry remarked, reflectively.

"Of course it would be perfectly easy and quite natural for some men to declare that they would do so and so no matter how they were situated, but it is one thing for a man to say what he would do if he was caught in a tight place and quite another thing for him to live up to his words when the time came to make them good."

"There is a deal of sense in that," Dick Delmayne affirmed.

"The fat is all in the fire now and thar's no two ways about it!" Higgins declared. "The galoot put it to me in sich a way that I had to weaken, and he is posted 'bout the hull durned business."

"He knows that I am in the camp then?" Dick Delmayne said in a thoughtful way, his brow dark with the lines of care.

"He does for a fact!" the ruffian replied with a doleful shake of the head.

"You see he suspected that you was hyer the moment he spotted me, and 'bout the furst question he axed arter he got me in a tight place was if you wasn't hiding some-whar in the camp, and he had the thing right down fine too for he suspicioned that Handsome Harry was mixed up in the speculation."

"Well, Higgins, you made an awful slip-up, and no mistake!" the gambler declared.

"That is so, you kin bet high on it!" the ruffian acknowledged, woefully.

"I ain't saying that I didn't, you know," he continued. "I am giving it to you honest, and as straight as a string. I did make an awful mess of it, for a fact, and thar's no two ways 'bout it."

"The cuss said that he was going to put the screws on me in a way I would despise before he began, and I will be gol-durned if he didn't do it too, although I didn't reckon he could make me squeal, and I talked back to him as sassy as you please, but the galoot knew what he was about a heap sight better than I thought he did, and he fetched the truth right out of me."

"Well, the mischief is done and there is no use of crying over spilt milk," Handsome Harry remarked with the air of a philosopher.

"The man knows now that we have gone a-gunning for him, and the question before the meeting is, what had we best do about the matter?"

"Oh, by the way, I forgot to tell you that the last thing the galoot said to me was for to say to you, Dick, that this hyer camp wasn't big enuff for to hold you and him," Higgins observed.

"Oho!" cried Handsome Harry, "that sounds as if the man meant business."

"I reckon that he does; it 'peared to me that I never see'd a man who was more in earnest since I was hatched," the ruffian declared.

"I reckon the time has come for you to see just how good a man this bloodhound is," the gambler observed to Dick Delmayne.

"He understands now who it is that has been putting up these jobs on him, and he is after satisfaction."

"Well, there is one consolation, in this country it is man to man, and he hasn't a gang of policemen at his heels," Dick Delmayne observed, grimly.

"That is true," the gambler asserted. "He can't spring any law business on you."

"I don't know but what it is for the best that things have turned out as they have," the New Yorker observed, in a meditative way. "This fellow has been dogging me for a long while, and I never had a chance to get a good crack at him yet."

"Your time has come now," Handsome Harry declared. "How are you with a gun, anyway?"

"Oh, I am a good shot. I used to put in a good deal of my time in the shooting-galleries in New York, and got so I could make about as many bull's-eyes as any of the fellows," Dick Delmayne answered, confidently.

The gambler shook his head.

"Well, shooting-gallery practice is all right for a man who cannot get anything better, but I can tell you, Delmayne, that shooting at a target that can't shoot back, and at a man with a pistol in his hand, who is trying his best to bore a hole through you, are two mighty different things," Handsome Harry remarked, with the air of a sage.

"Oh, yes, I suppose so. But then I never heard that this detective was any great shakes with a pistol, so I do not believe he will have much advantage over me," the New Yorker rejoined.

"If that is so the thing ought to be pretty even," the gambler observed.

"The fight will have to be on the square, you know, or else the boys will be apt to

make it warm for the man who comes out ahead."

"Oh yes, I understand that," Dick Delmayne replied. "Anyhow, I don't believe I could get the fellow in a tight place, no matter how hard I tried."

"He is on his guard, and will be on the lookout for traps," the New York crook continued. "So I will have to give him a fair show, whether I want to or not."

"That is so," the gambler agreed. "Well, the best way to fix it will be for you to send word that you will be waiting for him in the street outside of the hotel at nine o'clock to-night, and that if he is a man he will come out with his gun and settle the matter. Higgins can carry the message."

The crook thought this was the best plan and so the matter was settled.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE STREET FIGHT.

IN sending the challenge Dick Delmayne had screwed his courage up to the sticking point, to use the old expression.

He realized that he could not hope to succeed in getting the treasure, in search of which he had come to the far West, as long as the detective was in the field.

It was absolutely necessary for him to get Joe Phenix out of the way before he could do anything.

Then too the crook bore the detective a deadly hatred.

The man-hunter had hounded him persistently, as he termed it, and the confidence-man had brooded over the matter until he had wrought himself up to such a pitch that he was willing to risk his own life in order to get an opportunity to deal a deadly blow at the detective.

If he could put Joe Phenix out of the way the treasure was his, and he was really eager to get a chance to measure weapons with the detective, so it was without hesitation that he dispatched Higgins with the hostile message.

For a wonder that worthy who was wont to be so talkative was remarkably quiet, and did not make any comments in regard to the affair, but when he got to the door of the hotel, he relieved his mind by communing with himself, halting for a moment in the doorway for that purpose.

"This hyer New Yorker is making a fool of himself!" he declared. "The detective will lay him out as sure as kin be; I would be willing to bet two to one on it! And if Dick Delmayne goes under then it is good-by to Handsome Harry and myself getting a smell of the treasures of the Lost Mine, for the New Yorker has never revealed the secret of how to get at the mine."

"Mebbe if he isn't killed outright he will be willing to tell us, but even then if we know all about the thing, the chances are big that we couldn't git at it as long as this hyer detective is 'round."

"Blame me if the speculation hasn't been an awful unlucky one right from the beginning," he continued, shaking his head in a melancholy way.

"Thar's been a heap of trouble and bother for nothing, and it looks now as if we were going to be left, no matter what we do."

"One thing 'bout the affair is sart'in as far as I am consarned, and that is I ain't going to buck up ag'in' this hyer detective ag'in."

"I have tried him on once, got all I wanted, and I ain't hankering for any more, and as far as the Lost Mine is consarned, durn me if I am anxious to go in for it if I have got to fight this hyer detective. Money is a good thing but life is better, and I ain't agoing to risk throwing my life away for all the money in creation!"

Then the ruffian slouched into the hotel.

As will be perceived from these remarks Higgins had conceived a wonderful respect for the abilities of Joe Phenix.

When he entered the saloon he found the detective and the old mountain-man conversing with the landlord.

Having been instructed by Handsome Harry to deliver the defiance in as public a manner as possible, for it was the gambler's game to have the fight witnessed by a crowd, Higgins lost no time in making known his business, much to the astonishment of the landlord and the miners who were lounging in the saloon.

"All right! I am his man!" the detective exclaimed. "And you can tell him for me that I am very glad he has been so prompt in coming forward; it is much the best way. The quicker an affair of this kind is ended, the better."

"I will be on hand, and will be pleased to give him an opportunity to settle the grudge which I don't doubt he bears me, for I have bothered him considerably during the past five years, but now here is a chance for him to square the account."

"I will tell him jest what you say," Higgins replied, and then he departed.

Upon the landlord expressing his surprise after the ruffian withdrew, Joe Phenix explained that the man who had sent the challenge was an old enemy, and that he had been attacked by him in an underhand manner since coming to Crazy Camp.

"I am getting tired of that kind of business," he said in conclusion. "And since the man wants war, he might as well come out and face me openly, so I can get a fair chance at him, as to lie in wait for an opportunity to strike me in the back."

There was no gainsaying the truth of this, and the landlord expressed his opinion that Joe Phenix had acted wisely in forcing his enemy to come out into the open field.

From the fact that the challenge was given in so public a manner, the news that there was going to be a "shooting match" that night was not long in spreading about the camp, and as that was just the kind of a raree show that the miners most delighted in when nightfall came, there was the biggest crowd in and around the hotel that Crazy Camp had seen for many a long day.

There was a full moon, which rose early, so that there was ample light for the fighters, as all objects were almost as visible as in the full glare of the sun.

Speculation was rampant in regard to the contest, for although the detective by reason of his sojourn in the town, and association with the old mountain-man, was pretty well known, his opponent, on the contrary, was a stranger and public curiosity was much excited in regard to him.

From the fact that Tim Higgins carried the challenge, and he was known to be a pard of the gambler, Handsome Harry, it was surmised that the stranger who had defied Injun Pete's "pardner" to mortal combat was a friend of the gambler, but Dick Delmayne had kept himself so secluded since coming to the mining-camp that few of the inhabitants had ever seen him.

Therefore it followed that the great majority of the miners thought that Joe Phenix would prove the victor in the fight and were eager to bet their money accordingly.

In all mining-camps like the one of which we write the state of the betting represents public opinion, and as loud talking individuals went around, shaking money in their more or less dirty hands, offering to bet two to one on Injun Pete's pard, it was plain that there were few who believed that the unknown stranger stood much of a chance.

At nine o'clock to the minute Joe Phenix came out of the hotel, revolver in hand, and took up a position in the middle of the street.

This was the signal for the crowd to scatter.

None of the miners were anxious to stop a stray bullet, and in street fights of this kind the leaden balls sometimes went far wide of the mark, and had an unpleasant habit of imbedding themselves in the bodies of innocent bystanders.

So the moment it looked as if the fight was going to begin the miners made haste to get out of the way, selecting convenient points from which they might witness the encounter without danger of being hit by the flying bullets.

A minute or so after Joe Phenix took up his position in the middle of the street, Dick Delmayne made his appearance from behind a house, a couple of hundred feet away.

He too, like the detective, marched out into the center of the street, carrying his revolver openly displayed.

"Are you ready?" he exclaimed, after taking his position.

"All ready!" Joe Phenix replied. "Go ahead as soon as you like!"

"Look out for yourself, for I mean to kill you!" the crook exclaimed, in a loud and threatening way.

"Of course, that is what you are here for—if you can," the detective rejoined, beginning an advance upon the other as he spoke. The New Yorker followed the example of the detective.

The two advanced until they were within about seventy feet of each other, and then Dick Delmayne, thinking he had his adversary well within range, came to a halt, and leveling his revolver, sought to take a deadly aim at the heart of his antagonist.

But no sooner had he proceeded to do this than the words of the gambler in regard to there being such a vast difference between practicing in a shooting-gallery and meeting a foe upon the dueling-field, received practical illustration.

Joe Phenix was an excellent revolver-shot—in fact he was one of those rare geniuses who are so expert with all sorts of weapons, and the moment the crook came to a halt, and endeavored to draw a bead upon him, he blazed away at his man.

It was a snap-shot, and anticipated Dick Delmayne's fire by a second, just long enough to destroy the aim of the crook.

His bullet whistled harmlessly along, high in the air, but Joe Phenix's ball pierced the breast of the confidence man.

With a groan of pain Dick Delmayne threw up his arms and then fell forward upon his face.

The old, experienced men, who were judges of this sort of thing, came to the immediate conclusion that he was hard hit.

Hardly had the New Yorker fallen when the sharp crack of a rifle resounded on the air, the sound coming from the hillside, just above the town, on the right of the main street.

We say main street, but in reality the camp could only boast of a single avenue.

The hillside was dotted here and there with clumps of bushes, and from one of these clumps the shot had been fired.

A man concealed in the bushes had endeavored to kill the detective when it became apparent that he was destined to be the victor in the fight.

And it is probable that he would have succeeded in his design if the detective had not happened to step forward just as the shot was fired so that the bullet missed him by a few inches.

And then the spectators were treated to a scene which excited their amazement.

From the clump of bushes, from which the shot had been fired, came two men, struggling together in a mortal combat.

Both were well known to the spectators and were immediately recognized.

One was the gambler, Handsome Harry, the other the old mountain man, Injun Pete.

From the attitudes of the two the spectators had no difficulty in conjecturing that it had been Handsome Harry who had fired the rifle-shot, and Injun Pete was endeavoring to make him a prisoner.

The gambler was a powerful, muscular fellow and made a desperate attempt to escape from the grasp of the old mountain-man, but although he had the advantage of youth yet he was not able to break away from the old scout.

It was a desperate struggle, and the miners watched the contest with almost breathless interest, but no one thought of moving hand or foot to interfere with the fighters.

A minute or so the two struggled, the gambler trying his best to escape from the firm clutch of Injun Pete, and the old mountain-man holding on to him with a grip of iron.

Then, by a desperate effort, Handsome Harry wrenched himself loose, but apparently understanding that he had a most persistent foe to contend with, and he could not hope by flight to escape from the fleet-footed "Longlegs," the man acknowledged to be one of the best runners that the far West had ever known, he drew his bowie-knife and struck fiercely at the old mountain-man.

Injun Pete deftly dodged the stroke and then again closed in with the gambler.

A moment the two men struggled—muscle pressed against muscle, their forms interlocked like two angry serpents, striving to press the life out of each other, and then they went down, all in a heap.

On the ground the struggle was continued and now the spell seemed lifted which had

rooted the lookers-on to their places and a grand rush was made for the scene of the contest, each man anxious to beat his neighbor and arrive first by the side of the fighters, struggling so fiercely for the mastery.

But as the miners were all about equally favored as far as legs were concerned, and the spot where the struggle was taking place was only a few hundred feet away, the majority of the crowd arrived on the spot at about the same time.

And as the miners gathered around the pair the struggle ended.

Handsome Harry lay motionless upon the ground, and the old mountain-man rose to his feet, holding in his hand the bowie knife, which now bore upon the blade a crimson stain.

"Gen'lmen, I had to do it!" he exclaimed, as he looked upon the crowd. "He was a p'isen serpent! It was either his life or mine, and I reckon that the good old saying 'bout self-preservation being the first law of natur' fits in hyer mighty well!"

"If I hadn't struck him he would have let daylight inter me, and no mistake! But I ain't fit Injuns all these years for to allow any no-souled gambler for to wipe me out!"

"The man tried to assassinate me!" Joe Phenix exclaimed.

"You are right! He did for a sure enuff fact!" the old mountain-man replied.

"That was just the leetle game he tried on, but I was up to his trick."

"You see, gen'lemen," and Injun Pete addressed his conversation to the crowd, "I had a suspicion right from the beginning when this pard of Handsome Harry challenged my pard that thar was going to be some queer game about the matter."

"I know the breed so well, you know, that I am up to all their tricks."

"These sports ain't the men, you bet, to give a fellow a squar' deal for his money if they can possibly ring in a cold deck on him."

"Ay, ay—that is so—sure enuff—right for a fact!" came in hoarse murmurs from the lips of the miners.

Few in the throng had any confidence in the squareness of the sports if they could profit by a crooked game.

"So, as I said, I suspicioned that thar would be some crooked work 'bout the matter, so I went in for to play the spy, and was lucky enuff for to see thls chap stealing away to the hillside with his rifle," Injun Pete continued.

"I follered arter, but though I wasn't in time to keep him from firing I was to prevent the varmint from gitting away, and that is the hull of the trouble."

It was the general sentiment of the miners that Handsome Harry had only got what he deserved, and they did not hesitate to say so.

And one old, gray-bearded fellow voiced the opinion of the crowd by saying:

"Wa-al, Injun Pete, in my opinion it is a mighty good thing that you did slice the pesky galeot, for you have saved us the trouble of trying and hanging the cuss!"

The gambler had been killed outright by the knife-thrust, and his body was turned over to Tim Higgins, who loudly protested that though he had borne the hostile message, yet he had no idea that Handsome Harry meant to try any crooked business.

And in this the ruffian spoke the truth, for the gambler, anticipating that the New Yorker would not be the victor in the fight, had resolved to kill the detective by a rifle-shot from the hillside, being sure that he could easily succeed in escaping after the shot was fired.

The interference of the cunning old mountain-man had interfered with his scheme, and the result had brought destruction upon his own head.

Dick Delmayne had apparently been killed immediately by the detective's ball, but when the doctor came to make an examination, he thought he detected some signs of life, and therefore he had the body removed to the hotel.

Joe Phenix, Injun Pete, and the landlord accompanied the doctor, the crowd being excluded, much to their disgust, but the medical man declared bluntly that it wasn't no circus, and he could not make his examination in the presence of a gaping crowd.

The supposition that there was still some

life in the body was a false one, though, and it only took the doctor a few minutes to come to the conclusion, as he expressed it, that Dick Delmayne was as dead as Julius Caesar.

Then Joe Phenix explained the nature of his business in Crazy Camp, saying he was a detective from New York, and had pursued the dead man from the great metropolis; this was to account for his examination of the dead crook's pockets.

The detective was in search of a clew to the Lost Mine.

He was not successful in his search though, for no papers were found having any bearing upon the subject, and Joe Phenix came to the conclusion that the crook had been too cautious to put his knowledge in writing.

Hot on the trail though, he interviewed Tim Higgins, but that worthy declared that he knew nothing whatever about the matter. Dick Delmayne had not confided in him, and he said in conclusion that as far as he was concerned he was through with the matter, as he had come to the opinion that the Lost Mine brought bad luck to all who had anything to do with it.

Being thus baffled Joe Phenix resolved to go ahead on the description which he possessed.

A party was got together strong enough to bid defiance to the Apaches, and again the detective and the old mountain-man took up the search.

Aided by their previous knowledge they were enabled to proceed directly to the neighborhood where they believed the Lost Mine to be situated.

But when they arrived within a couple of miles of the valley where the white, dome-shaped rock stood, they had their party go into camp, and went on alone under pretense of hunting.

They found the spot at last.

There was gold there, sure enough, but only a few thousand dollars' worth; the Lost Mine was only a "pocket," and in a week a couple of men could take out all the wealth there was.

The men who had fancied that in this pocket they had struck the famous Lost Mine were not veteran miners and so had been deceived.

Joe Phenix's quest had ended, he had triumphed over the crooks, but the famous gold deposit had eluded him.

As for Injun Pete he laughed at the idea that this was the true Lost Mine.

"No, it exists, and I will find it some day!" he declared. "You kin bet yer life on it!"

THE END.

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